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THE MANDALAY EDITION
OF THE WORKS OF
RUDYARD KIPLING

KIM

THE NAULAHKA
A STORY OF WEST AND EAST
(IN COLLABORATION WITH WOLCOTT BAlestier)

BY
RUDYARD KIPLING



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KIM

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THE NAULAHKA

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KIM

CHAPTER I

'Oh ye who tread the Narrow Way
By Tophet-flare to Judgment Day,
Be gentle when the heathen pray
To Buddha at Kamakura!'

HE sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher—the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-Zammah, that 'fire-breathing dragon,' hold the Punjab, for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot.

There was some justification for Kim,—he had kicked Lala Dinanath's boy off the trunnions,—since the English held the Punjab and Kim was English. Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white—a poor white of the very poorest. The half-caste woman who looked after him (she smoked opium, and pretended to keep a second-hand furniture shop by the square where the cheap cabs wait) told the missionaries that she was Kim's mother's sister; but his mother had been nursemaid in a colonel's family and had married Kimball O'Hara, a young colour-sergeant

of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment. He afterwards took a post on the Sind, Punjab, and Delhi railway, and his regiment went home without him. The wife died of cholera in Ferozepore, and O'Hara fell to drink and loafing up and down the line with the keen-eyed three-year-old baby. Societies and chaplains, anxious for the child, tried to catch him, but O'Hara drifted away, till he came across the woman who took opium and learned the taste from her, and died as poor whites die in India. His estate at death consisted of three papers—one he called his ‘ne varietur’ because those words were written below his signature thereon, and another his ‘clearance-certificate.’ The third was Kim’s birth-certificate. Those things, he was used to say, in his glorious opium-hours, would yet make little Kimball a man. On no account was Kim to part with them, for they belonged to a great piece of magic—such magic as men practised over yonder behind the Museum, in the big blue and white Jadoo-Gher—the Magic House, as we name the Masonic Lodge. It would, he said, all come right some day, and Kim’s horn would be exalted between pillars—monstrous pillars—of beauty and strength. The Colonel himself, riding on a horse, at the head of the finest regiment in the world, would attend to Kim,—little Kim that should have been better off than his father. Nine hundred first-class devils, whose god was a Red Bull on a green field, would attend to Kim, if they had not forgotten O'Hara—poor O'Hara that was gang-foreman on the Ferozepore line. Then he would weep bitterly in the broken rush chair on the veranda. So it came about after his death that the woman sewed parchment, paper, and birth-certificate into a leather amulet-case which she strung round Kim’s neck.

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‘And some day,’ she said, confusedly remembering O’Hara’s prophecies, ‘there will come for you a great Red Bull on a green field, and the Colonel riding on his tall horse, yes, and’—dropping into English—‘nine hundred devils.’

‘Ah,’ said Kim, ‘I shall remember. A Red Bull and a Colonel on a horse will come, but first, my father said, will come the two men making ready the ground for these matters. That is how, my father said, they always did; and it is always so when men work magic.’

If the woman had sent Kim up to the local Jadoo-Gher with those papers, he would, of course, have been taken over by the Provincial Lodge and sent to the Masonic Orphanage in the Hills; but what she had heard of magic she distrusted. Kim, too, held views of his own. As he reached the years of indiscretion, he learned to avoid missionaries and white men of serious aspect who asked who he was, and what he did. For Kim did nothing with an immense success. True, he knew the wonderful walled city of Lahore from the Delhi Gate to the outer Fort Ditch; was hand in glove with men who led lives stranger than anything Haroun al Raschid dreamed of; and he lived in a life wild as that of the Arabian Nights, but missionaries and secretaries of charitable societies could not see the beauty of it. His nickname through the wards was ‘Little Friend of all the World’; and very often, being lithe and inconspicuous, he executed commissions by night on the crowded housetops for sleek and shiny young men of fashion. It was intrigue, of course,—he knew that much, as he had known all evil since he could speak,—but what he loved was the game for its own sake—the stealthy prowl through the dark gullies and lanes, the

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crawl up a water-pipe, the sights and sounds of the women's world on the flat roofs, and the headlong flight from housetop to housetop under cover of the hot dark. Then there were holy men, ash-smeared faquires by their brick shrines under the trees at the riverside, with whom he was quite familiar—greeting them as they returned from begging-tours, and, when no one was by, eating from the same dish. The woman who looked after him insisted with tears that he should wear European clothes—trousers, a shirt, and a battered hat. Kim found it easier to slip into Hindu or Mohammedan garb when engaged on certain businesses. One of the young men of fashion—he who was found dead at the bottom of a well on the night of the earthquake—had once given him a complete suit of Hindu kit, the costume of a low-caste street boy, and Kim stored it in a secret place under some baulks in Nila Ram's timber-yard, beyond the Punjab High Court, where the fragrant deodar logs lie seasoning after they have driven down the Ravee. When there was business or frolic afoot, Kim would use his properties, returning at dawn to the veranda, all tired out from shouting at the heels of a marriage procession, or yelling at a Hindu festival. Sometimes there was food in the house, more often there was not, and then Kim went out again to eat with his native friends.

As he drummed his heels against Zam-Zammah he turned now and again from his king-of-the-castle game with little Chota Lal, and Abdullah the sweetmeat-seller's son, to make a rude remark to the native policeman on guard over rows of shoes at the Museum door. The big Punjabi grinned tolerantly: he knew Kim of old. So did the water-carrier, sluicing water on the dry road

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from his goat-skin bag. So did Jawahir Singh, the Museum carpenter, bent over new packing-cases. So did everybody in sight except the peasants from the country, hurrying up to the Wonder House to view the things that men made in their own Province and elsewhere. The Museum was given up to Indian arts and manufactures, and anybody who sought wisdom could ask the curator to explain.

‘Off! Off! Let me up!’ cried Abdullah, climbing up Zam-Zammah’s wheel.

‘Thy father was a pastry-cook, Thy mother stole the ghi,’ sang Kim. ‘All Mussalmans fell off Zam-Zammah long ago!’

‘Let me up!’ shrilled little Chota Lal in his gilt-embroidered cap. His father was worth perhaps half a million sterling, but India is the only democratic land in the world.

‘The Hindus fell off Zam-Zammah too. The Mussalmans pushed them off. Thy father was a pastry-cook—’

He stopped; for there shuffled round the corner, from the roaring Motee Bazar, such a man as Kim, who thought he knew all castes, had never seen. He was nearly six feet high, dressed in fold upon fold of dingy stuff like horse-blanketing, and not one fold of it could Kim refer to any known trade or profession. At his belt hung a long open-work iron pencase and a wooden rosary such as holy men wear. On his head was a gigantic sort of tam-o’-shanter. His face was yellow and wrinkled, like that of Fook Shing, the Chinese boot-maker in the bazar. His eyes turned up at the corners and looked like little slits of onyx.

‘Who is that?’ said Kim to his companions.

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‘Perhaps it is a man,’ said Abdullah, finger in mouth, staring.

‘Without doubt,’ returned Kim; ‘but he is no man of India that I have ever seen.’

‘A priest, perhaps,’ said Chota Lal, spying the rosary. ‘See! He goes into the Wonder House!’

‘Nay, nay,’ said the policeman, shaking his head. ‘I do not understand your talk.’ The constable spoke Punjabi. ‘Oh, Friend of all the World, what does he say?’

‘Send him hither’ said Kim, dropping from Zam-Zammah, flourishing his bare heels. ‘He is a foreigner, and thou art a buffalo.’

The man turned helplessly and drifted towards the boys. He was old, and his woollen gaberdine still reeked of the stinking artemisia of the mountain passes.

‘O Children, what is that big house?’ he said in very fair Urdu.

‘The Ajaib-Gher, the Wonder House!’ Kim gave him no title—such as Lala or Mian. He could not divine the man’s creed.

‘Ah! The Wonder House! Can any enter?’

‘It is written above the door—all can enter.’

‘Without payment?’

‘I go in and out. I am no banker,’ laughed Kim.

‘Alas! I am an old man. I did not know.’ Then, fingering his rosary, he half turned to the Museum.

‘What is your caste? Where is your house? Have you come far?’ Kim asked.

‘I came by Kulu—from beyond the Kailas—but what know you? From the hills where’—he sighed—‘the air and water are fresh and cool.’

‘Aha! Khitai’ (a Chinaman), said Abdullah proudly.

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Fook Shing had once chased him out of his shop for spitting at the joss above the boots.

‘Pahari?’ (a hillman), said little Chota Lal.

‘Aye, child—a hillman from hills thou’lt never see. Didst hear of Bhotiyal (Tibet)? I am no Khitai, but a Bhotiya (Tibetan), since you must know—a lama—or, say a guru in your tongue.’

‘A guru from Tibet,’ said Kim. ‘I have not seen such a man. They be Hindus in Tibet, then?’

‘We be followers of the Middle Way, living in peace in our lamasseries, and I go to see the Four Holy Places before I die. Now do you, who are children, know as much as I do who am old.’ He smiled benignantly on the boys.

‘Hast thou eaten?’

He fumbled in his bosom and drew forth a worn wooden begging-bowl. The boys nodded. All priests of their acquaintance begged.

‘I do not wish to eat yet.’ He turned his head like an old tortoise in the sunlight. ‘Is it true that there are many images in the Wonder House of Lahore?’ He repeated the last words as one making sure of an address.

‘That is true,’ said Abdullah. ‘It is full of heathen buts. Thou also art an idolater.’

‘Never mind him,’ said Kim. ‘That is the Government’s house and there is no idolatry in it, but only a Sahib with a white beard. Come with me and I will show.’

‘Strange priests eat boys,’ whispered Chota Lal.

‘And he is a stranger and a but-parast’ (idolater), said Abdullah, the Mohammedan.

Kim laughed. ‘He is new. Run to your mothers’ laps, and be safe. Come!’

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Kim clicked round the self-registering turnstile; the old man followed and halted amazed. In the entrance-hall stood the larger figures of the Greco-Buddhist sculptures done, savants know how long since, by forgotten workmen whose hands were feeling, and not unskilfully, for the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch. There were hundreds of pieces, friezes of figures in relief, fragments of statues and slabs crowded with figures that had encrusted the brick walls of the Buddhist stupas and viharas of the North Country and now, dug up and labelled, made the pride of the Museum. In open-mouthed wonder the lama turned to this and that, and finally checked in rapt attention before a large alto-relief representing a coronation or apotheosis of the Lord Buddha. The Master was represented seated on a lotus the petals of which were so deeply undercut as to show almost detached. Round Him was an adoring hierarchy of kings, elders, and old-time Buddhas. Below were lotus-covered waters with fishes and water-birds. Two butterfly-winged dewas held a wreath over His head; above them another pair supported an umbrella surmounted by the jewelled headdress of the Bodhisat.

‘The Lord! The Lord! It is Sakya Muni himself,’ the lama half sobbed; and under his breath began the wonderful Buddhist invocation:—

‘To Him the Way—the Law—Apart—
Whom Maya held beneath her heart
Ananda’s Lord—the Bodhisat.’

‘And He is here! The Most Excellent Law is here also! My pilgrimage is well begun. And what work! What work!’

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‘Yonder is the Sahib,’ said Kim, and dodged sideways among the cases of the arts and manufacture wing. A white-bearded Englishman was looking at the lama, who gravely turned and saluted him and after some fumbling drew forth a note-book and a scrap of paper.

‘Yes, that is my name,’ smiling at the clumsy, childish print.

‘One of us who had made pilgrimage to the Holy Places—he is now Abbot of the Lung-Cho Monastery—gave it me,’ stammered the lama. ‘He spoke of these.’ His lean hand moved tremulously round.

‘Welcome, then, O lama from Tibet. Here be the images, and I am here’—he glanced at the lama’s face—‘to gather knowledge. Come to my office awhile.’ The old man was trembling with excitement.

The office was but a little wooden cubicle partitioned off from the sculpture-lined gallery. Kim laid himself down, his ear against a crack in the heat-split cedar door, and, following his instinct, stretched out to listen and watch.

Most of the talk was altogether above his head. The lama, haltingly at first, spoke to the curator of his own lamassery, the Suchzen, opposite the Painted Rocks, four months’ march away. The curator brought out a huge book of photos and showed him that very place, perched on its crag, overlooking the gigantic valley of many-hued strata.

‘Ay, ay!’ The lama mounted a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles of Chinese work. ‘Here is the little door through which we bring wood before winter. And thou—the English know of these things? He who is now Abbot of Lung-Cho told me, but I did not believe. The Lord—the Excellent One—He has honour here too? And His life is known?’

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'It is all carven upon the stones. Come and see, if thou art rested.'

Out shuffled the lama to the main hall, and, the curator beside him, went through the collection with the reverence of a devotee and the appreciative instinct of a craftsman.

Incident by incident in the beautiful story he identified on the blurred stone, puzzled here and there by the unfamiliar Greek convention, but delighted as a child at each new trove. Where the sequence failed, as in the Annunciation, the curator supplied it from his mound of books—French and German, with photographs and reproductions.

Here was the devout Asita, the pendant of Simeon in the Christian story, holding the Holy Child on his knee while mother and father listened; and here were incidents in the legend of the cousin Devadatta. Here was the wicked woman who accused the Master of impurity, all confounded; here was the teaching in the Deer-park; the miracle that stunned the fire-worshippers; here was the Bodhisat in royal state as a prince; the miraculous birth; the death at Kusinagara, where the weak disciple fainted; while there were almost countless repetitions of the meditation under the Bodhi tree; and the adoration of the alms-bowl was everywhere. In a few minutes the curator saw that his guest was no mere bead-telling mendicant, but a scholar of parts. And they went at it all over again, the lama taking snuff, wiping his spectacles, and talking at railway speed in a bewildering mixture of Urdu and Tibetan. He had heard of the travels of the Chinese pilgrims, Fo-Hian and Hwen-Thiang, and was anxious to know if there was any translation of their record. He drew in his breath as he

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turned helplessly over the pages of Beal and Stanislas Julien. ‘‘Tis all here. A treasure locked.’ Then he composed himself reverently to listen to fragments, hastily rendered into Urdu. For the first time he heard of the labours of European scholars, who by the help of these and a hundred other documents have identified the Holy Places of Buddhism. Then he was shown a mighty map, spotted and traced with yellow. The brown finger followed the curator’s pencil from point to point. Here was Kapilavastu, here the Middle Kingdom, and here Mahabodi, the Mecca of Buddhism; and here was Kusinagara, sad place of the Holy One’s death. The old man bowed his head over the sheets in silence for a while, and the curator lit another pipe. Kim had fallen asleep. When he waked, the talk, still in spate, was more within his comprehension.

‘And thus it was, O Fountain of Wisdom, that I decided to go to the Holy Places which His foot had trod—to the Birth-place, even to Kapila; then to Maha Bodhi, which is Buddh Gaya—to the Monastery—to the Deer-park—to the place of His death.’

The lama lowered his voice. ‘And I come here alone. For five—seven—eighteen—forty years it was in my mind that the Old Law was not well followed; being overlaid, as thou knowest, with devildom, charms, and idolatry. Even as the child outside said but now. Ay, even as the child said, with but-parasti.’

‘So it comes with all faiths.’

‘Thinkest thou? The books of my lamassery I read, and they were dried pith; and the later ritual with which we of the Reformed Law have cumbered ourselves—that, too, had no worth to these old eyes. Even the followers of the Excellent One are at feud on feud with one an-

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other. It is all illusion. Ay, maya, illusion. But I have another desire'—the seamed yellow face drew within three inches of the curator, and the long forefinger nail tapped on the table. 'Your scholars, by these books, have followed the Blessed Feet in all their wanderings; but there are things which they have not sought out. I know nothing,—nothing do I know,—but I go to free myself from the Wheel of Things by a broad and open road.' He smiled with most simple triumph. 'As a pilgrim to the Holy Places I acquire merit. But there is more. Listen to a true thing. When our gracious Lord, being as yet a youth, sought a mate, men said, in His father's court, that He was too tender for marriage. Thou knowest?'

The curator nodded, wondering what would come next.

'So they made the triple trial of strength against all comers. And at the test of the Bow, our Lord first breaking that which they gave Him, called for such a bow as none might bend. Thou knowest?'

'It is written. I have read.'

'And, overshooting all other marks, the arrow passed far and far beyond sight. At the last it fell; and, where it touched earth, there broke out a stream which presently became a River, whose nature, by our Lord's beneficence, and that merit He acquired ere He freed himself, is that whoso bathes in it washes away all taint and speckle of sin."

'So it is written,' said the curator sadly.

The lama drew a long breath. 'Where is that River? Fountain of Wisdom, where fell the arrow?'

'Alas, my brother, I do not know,' said the curator.

'Nay, if it please thee to forget—the one thing only

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that thou hast not told me. Surely thou must know? See, I am an old man! I ask with my head between thy feet, O Fountain of Wisdom. We know He drew the bow! We know the arrow fell! We know the stream gushed! Where, then, is the River? My dream told me to find it. So I came. I am here. But where is the River?

‘If I knew, think you I would not cry it aloud?’

‘By it one attains freedom from the Wheel of Things,’ the lama went on, unheeding. ‘The River of the Arrow! Think again! Some little stream, may be—dried in the heats? But the Holy One would never so cheat an old man.’

‘I do not know. I do not know.’

The lama brought his thousand-wrinkled face once more a handsbreadth from the Englishman’s. ‘I see thou dost not know. Not being of the Law, the matter is hid from thee.’

‘Ay—hidden—hidden.’

‘We are both bound, thou and I, my brother. But I—he rose with a sweep of the soft thick drapery—‘I go to cut myself free. Come also!’

‘I am bound,’ said the curator. ‘But whither goest thou?’

‘First to Kashi (Benares): where else? There I shall meet one of the pure faith in a Jain temple of that city. He also is a Seeker in secret, and from him haply I may learn. May be he will go with me to Buddh Gaya. Thence north and west to Kapilavastu, and there will I seek for the River. Nay, I will seek everywhere as I go—for the place is not known where the arrow fell.’

‘And how wilt thou go? It is a far cry to Delhi, and farther to Benares.’

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'By road and the trains. From Pathankot, having left the Hills, I came hither in a te-rain. It goes swiftly. At first I was amazed to see those tall poles by the side of the road snatching up and snatching up their threads,' —he illustrated the stoop and whirl of a telegraph-pole flashing past the train. 'But later, I was cramped and desired to walk, as I am used.'

'And thou art sure of thy road?' said the curator.

'Oh, for that one but asks a question and pays money, and the appointed persons despatch all to the appointed place. That much I knew in my lamassery from sure report,' said the lama proudly.

'And when dost thou go?' The curator smiled at the mixture of old-world piety and modern progress that is the note of India to-day.

'As soon as may be. I follow the places of His life till I come to the River of the Arrow. There is, moreover, a written paper of the hours of the trains that go south.'

'And for food?' Lamas, as a rule, have good store of money somewhere about them, but the curator wished to make sure.

'For the journey, I take up the Master's begging-bowl. Yes. Even as He went so go I, forsaking the ease of my monastery. There was with me when I left the hills a chela (disciple) who begged for me as the Rule demands, but halting in Kulu awhile a fever took him and he died. I have now no chela, but I will take the alms-bowl and thus enable the charitable to acquire merit.' He nodded his head valiantly.

Learned doctors of a lamassery do not beg, but the lama was an enthusiast in this quest.

'Be it so,' said the curator, smiling. 'Suffer me now to acquire merit. We be craftsmen together, thou and

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I. Here is a new book of white English paper: here be sharpened pencils two and three—thick and thin, all good for a scribe. Now lend me thy spectacles.'

The curator looked through them. They were heavily scratched, but the power was almost exactly that of his own pair, which he slid into the lama's hand, saying: 'Try these.'

'A feather! A very feather upon the face!' The old man turned his head delightedly and wrinkled up his nose. 'How scarcely do I feel them! How clearly do I see!'

'They be bilaur—crystal and will never scratch. May they help thee to thy River, for they are thine.'

'I will take them and the pencils and the white notebook,' said the lama, 'as a sign of friendship between priest and priest—and now'—he fumbled at his belt, detached the open iron-work pencase, and laid it on the curator's table. 'That is for a memory between thee and me—my pencase. It is something old—even as I am.'

It was a piece of ancient design, Chinese, of an iron that is not smelted these days; and the collector's heart in the curator's bosom had gone out to it from the first. For no persuasion would the lama resume his gift.

'When I return, having found the River, I will bring thee a written picture of the Padma Samthora—such as I used to make on silk at the lamassery. Yes—and of the Wheel of Life,' he chuckled, 'for we be craftsmen together, thou and I.'

The curator would have detained him: they are few in the world who still have the secret of the conventional brush-pen Buddhist pictures which are, as it were, half written and half drawn. But the lama strode out, head

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high in air, and pausing an instant before the great statue of a Bodhisat in meditation, brushed through the turnstiles.

Kim followed like a shadow. What he had overheard excited him wildly. This man was entirely new to all his experience, and he meant to investigate further: precisely as he would have investigated a new building or a strange festival in Lahore city. The lama was his trove, and he purposed to take possession. Kim's mother had been Irish too.

The old man halted by Zam-Zammah and looked round till his eye fell on Kim. The inspiration of his pilgrimage had left him for a while, and he felt old, forlorn, and very empty.

'Do not sit under that gun,' said the policeman loftily.

'Huh! Owl!' was Kim's retort on the lama's behalf. 'Sit under that gun if it please thee. When didst thou steal the milk-woman's slippers, Dunnoo?'

That was an utterly unfounded charge sprung on the spur of the moment, but it silenced Dunnoo, who knew that Kim's clear yell could call up legions of bad bazar boys if need arose.

'And whom didst thou worship within?' said Kim affably, squatting in the shade beside the lama.

'I worshipped none, child. I bowed before the Excellent Law.'

Kim accepted this new god without emotion. He knew already a few score.

'And what dost thou do?'

'I beg. I remember now it is long since I have eaten or drunk. What is the custom of charity in this town? In silence, as we do of Tibet, or speaking aloud?'

'Those who beg in silence starve in silence,' said Kim.

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quoting a native proverb. The lama tried to rise, but sank back again, sighing for his disciple, dead in far-away Kulu. Kim watched—head to one side, considering and interested.

‘Give me the bowl. I know the people of this city—all who are charitable. Give, and I will bring it back filled.’

Simply as a child the old man handed him the bowl.

‘Rest thou. I know the people.’

He trotted off to the open shop of a kunjri, a low-caste vegetable-seller, which lay opposite the belt-tramway line down the Motee Bazar. She knew Kim of old.

‘Oho, hast thou turned yogi with thy begging-bowl?’ she cried.

‘Nay,’ said Kim proudly. ‘There is a new priest in the city—a man such as I have never seen.’

‘Old priest—young tiger,’ said the woman angrily. ‘I am tired of new priests! They settle on our wares like flies. Is the father of my son a well of charity to give to all who ask?’

‘No,’ said Kim. ‘Thy man is rather yagi (bad-tempered) than yogi (a holy man). But this priest is new. The Sahib in the Wonder House has talked to him like a brother. O my mother, fill me this bowl. He waits.’

‘That bowl indeed! That cow-bellied basket! Thou hast as much grace as the holy bull of Shiv. He has taken the best of a basket of onions already, this morn; and forsooth, I must fill thy bowl. He comes here again.’

The huge, mouse-coloured Brahminee bull of the ward was shouldering his way through the many-coloured crowd, a stolen plantain hanging out of his

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mouth. He headed straight for the shop, well knowing his privileges as a sacred beast, lowered his head, and puffed heavily along the line of baskets ere making his choice. Up flew Kim's hard little heel and caught him on his moist blue nose. He snorted indignantly, and walked away across the tram rails, his hump quivering with rage.

'See! I have saved more than the bowl will cost thrice over. Now, mother, a little rice and some dried fish atop—yes, and some vegetable curry.'

A growl came out of the back of the shop, where a man lay.

'He drove away the bull,' said the woman in an undertone. 'It is good to give to the poor.' She took the bowl and returned it full of hot rice.

'But my yogi is not a cow,' said Kim gravely, making a hole with his fingers in the top of the mound. 'A little curry is good, and a fried cake, and a morsel of conserve would please him, I think.'

'It is a hole as big as thy head,' said the woman fretfully. But she filled it, none the less, with good, steaming vegetable curry, clapped a dried cake atop, and a morsel of clarified butter on the cake, dabbed a lump of sour tamarind conserve at the side; and Kim looked at the load lovingly.

'That is good. When I am in the bazar the bull shall not come to this house. He is a bold beggarman.'

'And thou?' laughed the woman. 'But speak well of bulls. Hast thou not told me that some day a Red Bull will come out of a field to help thee? Now hold all straight and ask for the holy man's blessing upon me. Perhaps, too, he knows a cure for my daughter's sore eyes. Ask him that also, O thou Little Friend of all the World.'

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But Kim had danced off ere the end of the sentence, dodging pariah dogs and hungry acquaintances.

'Thus do we beg who know the way of it,' said he proudly to the lama, who opened his eyes at the contents of the bowl. 'Eat now and—I will eat with thee. Ohe bhistie!' he called to the water-carrier, sluicing the crotons by the Museum. 'Give water here. We men are thirsty.'

'We men!' said the bhistie, laughing. 'Is one skinful enough for such a pair? Drink then, in the name of the Compassionate.'

He loosed a thin stream into Kim's hands, who drank native fashion; but the lama must needs pull out a cup from his inexhaustible upper draperies and drink ceremonially.

'Pardesi' (a foreigner), Kim explained, as the old man delivered in an unknown tongue what was evidently a blessing.

They ate together in great content, clearing the beggar's bowl. Then the lama took snuff from a portentous wooden snuff-gourd, fingered his rosary awhile, and so dropped into the easy sleep of age, as the shadow of Zam-Zammah grew long.

Kim loafed over to the nearest tobacco-seller, a rather lively young Mohammedan woman, and begged a rank cigar of the brand that they sell to students of the Punjab University who copy English customs. Then he smoked and thought, knees to chin, under the belly of the gun, and the outcome of his thoughts was a sudden and stealthy departure in the direction of Nila Ram's timber-yard.

The lama did not wake till the evening life of the city had begun with lamp-lighting and the return of white-

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robed clerks and subordinates from the Government offices. He stared dizzily in all directions, but none looked at him save a Hindu urchin in a dirty turban and Isabella-coloured clothes. Suddenly he bowed his head on his knees and wailed.

‘What is this?’ said the boy, standing before him.
‘Hast thou been robbed?’

‘It is my new chela (my disciple) that is gone away from me, and I know not where he is.’

‘And what like of man was thy disciple?’

‘It was a boy who came to me in place of him who died, on account of the merit which I had gained when I bowed before the Law within there.’ He pointed towards the Museum. ‘He came upon me to show me a road which I had lost. He led me into the Wonder House, and by his talk emboldened to speak to the Keeper of the Images, so that I was cheered and made strong. And when I was faint with hunger he begged for me, as would a chela for his teacher. Suddenly was he sent. Suddenly has he gone away. It was in my mind to have taught him the Law upon the road to Benares.’

Kim stood amazed at this, because he had overheard the talk in the Museum, and knew that the old man was speaking the truth, which is a thing a native on the road seldom presents to a stranger.

‘But I see now that he was but sent for a purpose. By this I know that I shall find a certain River for which I seek.’

‘The River of the Arrow?’ said Kim, with a superior smile.

‘Is this yet another Sending?’ cried the lama. ‘To none have I spoken of my search, save to the Priest of the Images. Who art thou?’

KIM

‘Thy chela,’ said Kim simply, sitting on his heels. ‘I have never seen any one like to thee in all this my life. I go with thee to Benares. And, too, I think that so old a man as thou, speaking the truth to chance-met people at dusk, is in great need of a disciple.’

‘But the River—the River of the Arrow?’

‘Oh, that I heard when thou wast speaking to the Englishman. I lay against the door.’

The lama sighed. ‘I thought thou hadst been a guide permitted. Such things fall sometimes—but I am not worthy. Thou dost not, then, know of the River?’

‘Not I.’ Kim laughed uneasily. ‘I go to look for—for a bull—a Red Bull on a green field who shall help me.’ Boylike, if an acquaintance had a scheme, Kim was quite ready with one of his own; and, boylike, he had really thought for as much as twenty minutes at a time of his father’s prophecy.

‘To what, child?’ said the lama.

‘God knows, but so my father told me. I heard thy talk in the Wonder House of all those new strange places in the Hills, and if one so old and so little—so used to truth-telling—may go out for the small matter of a river, it seemed to me that I too must go a-travelling. If it is our fate to find those things we shall find them—thou, thy River; and I, my Bull, and the strong Pillars and some other matters that I forget.’

‘It is not pillars but a Wheel from which I would be free,’ said the lama.

‘That is all one. Perhaps they will make me a king,’ said Kim, serenely prepared for anything.

‘I will teach thee other and better desires upon the road,’ the lama replied in the voice of authority. ‘Let us go to Benares.’

KIM

'Not by night. Thieves are abroad. Wait till the day.'

'But there is no place to sleep.' The old man was used to the order of his monastery, and though he slept on the ground, as the Rule decrees, preferred a decency in these things.

'We shall get good lodging at the Kashmir Serai,' said Kim, laughing at his perplexity. 'I have a friend there. Come!'

The hot and crowded bazars blazed with light as they made their way through the press of all the races in Upper India, and the lama mooned through it like a man in a dream. It was his first experience of a large manufacturing city, and the crowded tram-car with its continually squealing brakes frightened him. Half pushed, half towed, he arrived at the high gate of the Kashmir Serai: that huge open square over against the railway station, surrounded with arched cloisters where the camel and horse caravans put up on their return from Central Asia. Here were all manner of Northern folk, tending tethered ponies and kneeling camels; loading and unloading bales and bundles; drawing water for the evening meal at the creaking well-windlasses; piling grass before the shrieking, wild-eyed stallions; cuffing the surly caravan dogs; paying off camel-drivers; taking on new grooms; swearing, shouting, arguing, and chaffering in the packed square. The cloisters, reached by three or four masonry steps, made a haven of refuge around this turbulent sea. Most of them were rented to traders, as we rent the arches of a viaduct; the space between pillar and pillar being bricked or boarded off into rooms, which were guarded by heavy wooden doors and cumbrous native padlocks. Locked doors showed that the owner was away, and a few rude—sometimes

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very rude—chalk or paint scratches told where he had gone. Thus: ‘Lutuf Ullah is gone to Kurdistan.’ Below, in coarse verse: ‘O Allah, who sufferest lice to live on the coat of a Kabuli, why hast thou allowed this louse Lutuf to live so long?’

Kim, fending the lama between excited men and excited beasts, sidled along the cloisters to the far end, nearest the railway station, where Mahbub Ali, the horsetrader, lived when he came in from that mysterious land beyond the Passes of the North.

Kim had had many dealings with Mahbub in his little life,—especially between his tenth and his thirteenth year,—and the big burly Afghan, his beard dyed scarlet with lime (for he was elderly and did not wish his gray hairs to show), knew the boy’s value as a gossip. Sometimes he would tell Kim to watch a man who had nothing whatever to do with horses: to follow him for one whole day and report every soul with whom he talked. Kim would deliver himself of his tale at evening, and Mahbub would listen without a word or gesture. It was intrigue of some kind, Kim knew; but its worth lay in saying nothing whatever to any one except Mahbub, who gave him beautiful meals all hot from the cookshop at the head of the serai, and once as much as eight annas in money.

‘He is here,’ said Kim, hitting a bad-tempered camel on the nose. ‘Ohe, Mahbub Ali!’ He halted at a dark arch and slipped behind the bewildered lama.

The horse-trader, his deep, embroidered Bokhariot belt unloosed, was lying on a pair of silk carpet saddlebags, pulling lazily at an immense silver hookah. He turned his head very slightly at the cry; and seeing only the tall silent figure, chuckled in his deep chest.

KIM

'Allah! A lama! A Red Lama! It is far from Lahore to the Passes. What dost thou do here?'

The lama held out the begging-bowl mechanically.

'God's curse on all unbelievers!' said Mahbub. 'I do not give to a lousy Tibetan; but ask my Baltis over yonder behind the camels. They may value your blessings. Oh, horse-boys, here is a countryman of yours. See if he be hungry.'

A shaven, crouching Balti, who had come down with the horses, and who was nominally some sort of degraded Buddhist, fawned upon the priest, and in thick gutturals besought the Holy One to sit at the horse-boys' fire.

'Go!' said Kim, pushing him lightly, and the lama strode away, leaving Kim at the edge of the cloister.

'Go!' said Mahbub Ali, returning to his hookah. 'Little Hindu, run away. God's curse on all unbelievers! Beg from those of my tail who are of thy faith.'

'Maharaj,' whined Kim, using the Hindu form of address, and thoroughly enjoying the situation; 'my father is dead—my mother is dead—my stomach is empty.'

'Beg from my men among the horses, I say. There must be some Hindus in my tail.'

'Oh, Mahbub Ali, but am I a Hindu?' said Kim in English.

The trader gave no sign of astonishment, but looked under shaggy eyebrows.

'Little Friend of all the World,' said he, 'what is this?'

'Nothing. I am now that holy man's disciple; and we go a pilgrimage together—to Benares, he says. He is quite mad, and I am tired of Lahore city. I wish new air and water.'

'But for whom dost thou work? Why come to me?' The voice was harsh with suspicion.

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'To whom else should I come? I have no money. It is not good to go about without money. Thou wilt sell many horses to the officers. They are very fine horses, these new ones: I have seen them. Give me a rupee, Mahbub Ali, and when I come to my wealth I will give thee a bond and pay.'

'Um,' said Mahbub Ali, thinking swiftly. 'Thou hast never before lied to me. Call that lama—stand back in the dark.'

'Oh, our tales will agree,' said Kim laughing.

'We go to Benares,' said the lama, as soon as he understood the drift of Mahbub Ali's questions. 'The boy and I. I go to seek for a certain River.'

'Maybe—but the boy?'

'He is my disciple. He was sent, I think, to guide me to that River. Sitting under a gun was I when he came suddenly. Such things have befallen the fortunate to whom guidance was allowed. But I remember now, he said he was of this world—a Hindu.'

'And his name?'

'That I did not ask. Is he not my disciple?'

'His country—his race—his village? Mussalman—Sikh—Hindu—Jain—low caste or high?'

'Why should I ask? There is neither high nor low in the Middle Way. If he is my chela—does—will—can any one take him from me? for, look you, without him I shall not find my River.' He wagged his head solemnly.

'None shall take him from thee. Go, sit among my Baltis,' said Mahbub Ali, and the lama drifted off, soothed by the promise.

'Is he not quite mad?' said Kim, coming forward to the light again. 'Why should I lie to thee, Hajji?'

Mahbub puffed his hookah in silence. Then he be-

gan, almost whispering: ‘Umballa is on the road to Benares—if indeed ye two go there.’

‘Tck! Tck! I tell thee he does not know how to lie—as we two know.’

‘And if thou wilt carry a message for me as far as Umballa, I will give thee money. It concerns a horse—a white stallion which I have sold to an officer upon the last time I returned from the Passes. But then—stand nearer and hold up hands as begging—the pedigree of the white stallion was not fully established, and that officer, who is now at Umballa, bade me make it clear.’ (Mahbub here described the horse and the appearance of the officer.) ‘So the message to that officer will be: “The pedigree of the white stallion is fully established.” By this will he know that thou comest from me. He will then say “What proof hast thou?” and thou wilt answer: “Mahbub Ali has given me the proof.”’

‘And all for the sake of a white stallion,’ said Kim, with a giggle, his eyes aflame.

‘That pedigree I will give thee now—in my own fashion—and some hard words as well.’ A shadow passed behind Kim, and a feeding camel. Mahbub Ali raised his voice.

‘Allah! Art thou the only beggar in the city? Thy mother is dead. Thy father is dead. So is it with all of them. Well, well—’ he turned as feeling on the floor beside him and tossed a flap of soft, greasy Mussalman bread to the boy. ‘Go and lie down among my horse-boys for to-night—thou and the lama. To-morrow I may give thee service.’

Kim slunk away, his teeth in the bread, and, as he expected, he found a small wad of folded tissue-paper wrapped in oil-skin, with three silver rupees—enormous

largesse. He smiled and thrust money and paper into his leather amulet-case. The lama, sumptuously fed by Mahbub's Baltis, was already asleep in a corner of one of the stalls. Kim lay down beside him and laughed. He knew he had rendered a service to Mahbub Ali, and not for one little minute did he believe the tale of the stallion's pedigree.

But Kim did not suspect that Mahbub Ali, known as one of the best horse-dealers in the Punjab, a wealthy and enterprising trader, whose caravans penetrated far and far into the Back of Beyond, was registered in one of the locked books of the Indian Survey Department as C.25.1B. Twice or thrice yearly C.25 would send in a little story, badly told but most interesting, and generally—it was checked by the statements of R.17 and M.4—quite true. It concerned all manner of out-of-the-way mountain principalities, explorers of nationalities other than English, and the gun-trade—was, in brief, a small portion of that vast mass of ‘information received’ on which the Indian Government acts. But, recently, five confederated Kings, who had no business to confederate, had been informed by a kindly Northern Power that there was a leakage of news from their territories into British India. So those Kings’ prime ministers were seriously annoyed and took steps, after the Oriental fashion. They suspected, among many others, the bullying red-bearded horse-dealer whose caravans ploughed through their fastnesses belly deep in snow. At least, his caravan that season had been ambushed and shot at twice on the way down, when Mahbub’s men accounted for three strange ruffians who might, or might not, have been hired for the job. Therefore Mahbub had avoided halting at the insalubrious city of

Peshawur, and had come through without stop to Lahore, where, knowing his country-people, he anticipated curious developments.

And there was that on Mahbub Ali which he did not wish to keep an hour longer than was necessary—a wad of closely folded tissue-paper, wrapped in oil-skin—an impersonal, unaddressed statement, with five microscopic pin-holes in one corner, that most scandalously betrayed the five confederated Kings, the sympathetic Northern Power, a Hindu banker in Peshawur, a firm of gun-makers in Belgium, and an important, semi-independent Mohammedan ruler to the south. This last was R.17's work, which Mahbub had picked up beyond the Dora Pass and was carrying in for R.17, who, owing to circumstances over which he had no control, could not leave his post of observation. Dynamite was milky and innocuous beside that report of C.25; and even an Oriental, with an Oriental's views of the value of time, could see that the sooner it was in the proper hands the better. Mahbub had no particular desire to die by violence, because two or three family blood-feuds across the border hung unfinished on his hands, and when these scores were cleared he intended to settle down as a more or less virtuous citizen. He had never passed the serai gate since his arrival two days ago, but had been ostentatious in sending telegrams to Bombay, where he banked some of his money; to Delhi, where a sub-partner of his own clan was selling horses to the agent of a Rajputana state; and to Umballa, where an Englishman was excitedly demanding the pedigree of a white stallion. The public letter-writer, who knew English, composed excellent telegrams, such as:—‘Creighton, Laurel Bank, Umballa.—Horse is

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Arabian as already advised. Sorrowful delayed-pedigree which am translating.' And later to the same address: 'Much sorrowful delay. Will forward pedigree.' To this sub-partner at Delhi he wired: 'Lutuf Ullah.—Have wired two thousand rupees your credit Luchman Narain's bank.' This was entirely in the way of trade, but every one of those telegrams was discussed and re-discussed, by parties who conceived themselves to be interested, before they went over to the railway station in charge of a foolish Balti, who allowed all sorts of people to read them on the road.

When, in Mahbub's own picturesque language, he had muddied the wells of inquiry with the stick of precaution, Kim had dropped on him, sent from heaven; and, being as prompt as he was unscrupulous, Mahbub Ali, used to taking all sorts of gusty chances, pressed him into service on the spot.

A wandering lama with a low-caste boy-servant might attract a moment's interest as they wandered about India, the land of pilgrims; but no one would suspect them or, what was more to the point, rob.

He called for a new light-ball to his hookah, and considered the case. If the worst came to the worst, and the boy came to harm, the paper would incriminate nobody. And he would go up to Umballa leisurely and—at a certain risk of exciting fresh suspicion—repeat his tale by word of mouth to the people concerned.

But R.17's report was the kernel of the whole affair, and it would be distinctly inconvenient if that failed to come to hand. However, God was great, and Mahbub Ali felt he had done all he could for the time being. Kim was the one soul in the world who had never told him a lie. That would have been a fatal blot on Kim's

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character if Mahbub had not known that to others, for his own ends or Mahbub's business, Kim could lie like an Oriental.

Then Mahbub Ali rolled across the serai to the Gate of the Harpies who paint their eyes and trap the stranger, and was at some pains to call on the one girl who, he had reason to believe, was a particular friend of a smooth-faced Kashmiri pundit who had waylaid his simple Balti in the matter of the telegrams. It was an utterly foolish thing to do; because they fell to drinking perfumed brandy against the Law of the Prophet, and Mahbub grew wonderfully drunk, and the gates of his mouth were loosened, and he pursued the Flower of Delight with the feet of intoxication till he fell flat among the cushions, where the Flower of Delight, aided by a smooth-faced Kashmiri pundit, searched him from head to foot most thoroughly.

About the same hour Kim heard soft feet in Mahbub's deserted stall. The horse-trader, curiously enough, had left his door unlocked, and his men were busy celebrating their return to India with a whole sheep of Mahbub's bounty. A sleek young gentleman from Delhi, armed with a bunch of keys which the Flower had unshackled from the senseless one's belt, went through every single box, bundle, mat, and saddle-bag in Mahbub's possession even more systematically than the Flower and the pundit were searching the owner.

'And I think,' said the Flower scornfully an hour later, one rounded elbow on the snoring carcase, 'that he is no more than a pig of an Afghan horse-dealer, with no thought except women and horses. Moreover, he may have sent it away by now—if ever there were such a thing.'

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'Nay—in a matter touching Five Kings it would be next his black heart,' said the pundit. 'Was there nothing?'

The Delhi man laughed and resettled his turban as he entered. 'I searched between the soles of his slippers as the Flower searched his clothes. This is not the man but another. I leave little unseen.'

'They did not say he was the very man,' said the pundit thoughtfully. 'They said, "Look if he be the man, since our councils are troubled."'

'That North country is full of horse-dealers as an old coat of lice. There is Sikandar Khan, Nur Ali Beg, and Farrukh Shah—all heads of Kafilas—who deal there,' said the Flower.

'They have not yet come in,' said the pundit. 'Thou must ensnare them later.'

'Phew!' said the Flower with deep disgust, rolling Mahbub's head from her lap. 'I earn my money. Farrukh Shah is a bear, Ali Beg a swashbuckler, and old Sikandar Khan—yaie! Go! I sleep now. This swine will not stir till dawn.'

When Mahbub woke, the Flower talked to him severely on the sin of drunkenness. Asiatics do not wink when they have out-manœuvred an enemy, but as Mahbub Ali cleared his throat, tightened his belt, and staggered forth under the early morning stars, he came very near to it.

'What a colt's trick,' said he to himself. 'As if every girl in Peshawur did not use it! But 'twas prettily done. Now God He knows how many more there be upon the road who have orders to test me—perhaps with the knife. So it stands that the boy must go to Umballa—and by rail—for the writing is something

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urgent. I abide here, following the Flower and drinking wine as an Afghan coper should.'

He halted at the stall next but one to his own. His men lay there heavy with sleep. There was no sign of Kim or the lama.

'Up!' He stirred a sleeper. 'Whither went those who lay here last even—the lama and the boy? Is aught missing?'

'Nay,' grunted the man; 'the old madman rose at second cockcrow saying he would go to Benares, and the young one led him away.'

'The curse of Allah on all unbelievers,' said Mahbub heartily, and climbed into his own stall, growling in his beard.

But it was Kim who had wakened the lama—Kim with one eye laid against a knot-hole in the planking, who had seen the Delhi man's search through the boxes. This was no common thief that turned over letters, bills, and saddles—no mere burglar who ran a little knife sideways into the soles of Mahbub's slippers, or picked the seams of the saddle-bags so deftly. At first Kim had been minded to give the alarm—the long-drawn 'cho-or—choor!' (thief! thief!) that sets the serai ablaze of nights; but he looked more carefully, and, hand on amulet, drew his own conclusions.

'It must be the pedigree of that made-up horse-lie,' said he, 'the thing that I carry to Umballa. Better that we go now. Those who search bags with knives may presently search bellies with knives. Surely there is a woman behind this. Hai! Hai!' in a whisper to the light-sleeping old man. 'Come. It is time—time to go to Benares.'

The lama rose obediently, and they passed out of the serai like shadows.

U. S. 726608

CHAPTER II

‘For whoso will, from Pride released,
Contemning neither creed nor priest,
May hear the Soul of all the East
About him at Kamakura.’

THEY entered the fort-like railway station, black in the end of night; the electrics sizzling over the goods yard where they handle the heavy Northern grain-traffic.

‘This is the work of devils!’ said the lama, recoiling from the hollow echoing darkness, the glimmer of rails between the masonry platforms, and the maze of girders above. He stood in a gigantic stone hall paved, it seemed, with the sheeted dead—third-class passengers who had taken their tickets overnight and were sleeping in the waiting-rooms. All hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals, and their passenger traffic is regulated accordingly.

‘This is where the fire-carriages come. One stands behind that hole’—Kim pointed to the ticket-office—‘who will give thee a paper to take thee to Umballa.’

‘But we go to Benares,’ he replied petulantly.

‘All one. Benares then. Quick: she comes!’

‘Take thou the purse.’

The lama, not so well used to trains as he had pretended, started as the 3.25 a. m. south bound roared in.

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The sleepers sprang to life, and the station filled with clamour and shoutings, cries of water and sweetmeat vendors, shouts of native policemen, and shrill yells of women gathering up their baskets, their families, and their husbands.

'It is the train—only the te-rain. It will come here. Wait!' Amazed at the lama's immense simplicity (he had handed him a small bag full of rupees), Kim asked and paid for a ticket to Umballa. A sleepy clerk grunted and flung out a ticket to the next station, just six miles distant.

'Nay,' said Kim, scanning it with a grin. 'This may serve for farmers, but I live in the city of Lahore. It was cleverly done, babu. Now give the ticket to Umballa.'

The babu scowled and dealt the proper ticket.

'Now another to Amritzar,' said Kim, who had no notion of spending Mahbub Ali's money on anything so crude as a paid ride to Umballa. 'The price is so much. The small money in return is just so much. I know the ways of the te-rain. . . . Never did yogi need chela as thou dost,' he went on merrily to the bewildered lama. 'They would have flung thee out at Mian Mir but for me. This way! Come.' He returned the money, keeping only one anna in each rupee of the price of the Umballa ticket as his commission—the immemorial commission of Asia.

The lama jibbed at the open door of a crowded third-class carriage. 'Were it not better to walk?' said he weakly.

A burly Sikh artisan thrust forth his bearded head. 'Is he afraid? Do not be afraid. I remember the time when I was afraid of the te-rain. Enter! This thing is the work of the Government.'

KIM

'I do not fear,' said the lama. 'Have ye room within for two?'

'There is no room even for a mouse,' shrilled the wife of a well-to-do cultivator—a Hindu Jat from the rich Jullundur district. Our night trains are not as well looked after as the day ones, where the sexes are very strictly kept to separate carriages.

'Oh, mother of my son, we can make space,' said the blue-turbaned husband. 'Pick up the child. It is a holy man, see'st thou?'

'And my lap full of seventy times seven bundles! Why not bid him sit on my knee, Shameless? But men are ever thus!' She looked round for approval. An Amritzar courtesan near the window sniffed behind her head drapery.

'Enter! Enter!' cried a fat Hindu money-lender, his folded account-book in a cloth under his arm. With an oily smirk: 'It is well to be kind to the poor.'

'Ay, at seven per cent a month with a mortgage on the unborn calf,' said a young Dogra soldier going south on leave; and they all laughed.

'Will it travel to Benares?' said the lama.

'Assuredly. Else why should we come? Enter, or we are left,' cried Kim.

'See!' shrilled the Amritzar girl. 'He has never entered a train. Oh see!'

'Nay, help,' said the cultivator, putting out a large brown hand and hauling him in. 'Thus is it done, father.'

'But—but—I sit on the floor. It is against the Rule to sit on a bench,' said the lama. 'Moreover, it cramps me.'

'I say,' began the money-lender, pursing his lips,

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‘that there is not one rule of right living which these te-rains do not cause us to break. We sit, for example, side by side with all castes and peoples.’

‘Yea, and with most outrageously shameless ones,’ said the wife, scowling at the Amritzar girl making eyes at the young sepoy.

‘I said we might have gone by cart along the road,’ said the husband, ‘and thus have saved some money.’

‘Yes—and spent twice over what we saved on food by the way. That was talked out ten thousand times.’

‘Ay, by ten thousand tongues,’ grunted he.

‘The Gods help us poor women if we may not speak. Oho! He is of that sort which may not look at or reply to a woman.’ For the lama, constrained by his Rule, took not the faintest notice of her. ‘And his disciple is like him?’

‘Nay, mother,’ said Kim most promptly. ‘Not when the woman is well-looking and above all charitable to the hungry.’

‘A beggar’s answer,’ said the Sikh, laughing. ‘Thou hast brought it on thyself, sister!’ Kim’s hands were crooked in supplication.

‘And whither goest thou?’ said the woman, handing him the half of a cake from a greasy package.

‘Even to Benares.’

‘Jugglers belike?’ the young soldier suggested. ‘Have ye any tricks to pass the time? Why does not that yellow man answer?’

‘Because,’ said Kim stoutly, ‘he is holy, and thinks upon matters hidden from thee.’

‘That may be well. We of the Loodhiana Sikhs,’ he rolled it out sonorously, ‘do not trouble our heads with doctrine. We fight.’

'My sister's brother's son is naik (corporal) in that regiment,' said the Sikh craftsman quietly. 'There are also some Dogra companies there.' The soldier glared, for a Dogra is of other caste than a Sikh, and the banker tittered.

'They are all one to me,' said the Amritzar girl.

'That we believe,' snorted the cultivator's wife malignantly.

'Nay, but all who serve the Sirkar with weapons in their hands are, as it were, one brotherhood. There is one brotherhood of the caste, but beyond that again—she looked round timidly—'the bond of the Pulton—the Regiment—eh?'

'My brother is in a Jat regiment,' said the cultivator. 'Dogras be good men.'

'Thy Sikhs at least were of that opinion,' said the soldier, with a scowl at the placid old man in the corner. 'Thy Sikhs thought so when our two companies came to help them at the Pirzai Kotal in the face of eight Afreedee standards on the ridge not three months gone.'

He told the story of a border action in which the Dogra companies of the Loodhiana Sikhs had acquitted themselves well. The Amritzar girl smiled; for she knew the tale was to win her approval.

'Alas!' said the cultivator's wife at the end. 'So their villages were burnt and their little children made homeless?'

'They had marked our dead. They paid a great payment after we of the Sikhs had schooled them. So it was. Is this Amritzar?'

'Ay, and here they cut our tickets,' said the banker, fumbling at his belt.

The lamps were paling in the dawn when the half-

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caste guard came round. Ticket-collecting is a slow business in the East, where people secrete their tickets in all sorts of curious places. Kim produced his and was told to get out.

'But I go to Umballa,' he protested. 'I go with this holy man.'

'Thou canst go to Jehannum for aught I care. This ticket is only to Amritzar. Out!'

Kim burst into a flood of tears, protesting that the lama was his father and his mother, that he was the prop of the lama's declining years, and that the lama would die without his care. All the carriage bade the guard be merciful,—the banker was specially eloquent here,—but the guard hauled Kim on to the platform. The lama blinked, he could not overtake the situation, and Kim lifted up his voice and wept outside the carriage window.

'I am very poor. My father is dead—my mother is dead. Oh, charitable ones, if I am left here, who shall tend that old man?'

'What—what is this?' the lama repeated. 'He must go to Benares. He must come with me. He is my chela. If there is money to be paid—'

'Oh, be silent,' whispered Kim; 'are we Rajahs to throw away good silver when the world is so charitable?'

The Amritzar girl stepped out with her bundles, and it was on her that Kim kept his watchful eye. Ladies of that persuasion, he knew, were generous.

'A ticket—a little tikkut to Umballa—O Breaker of Hearts!' She laughed. 'Hast thou no charity?'

'Does the holy man come from the North?'

'From far and far in the North he comes,' cried Kim. 'From among the hills.'

KIM

‘There is snow among the pine trees in the North—in the hills there is snow. My mother was from Kulu. Get thee a ticket. Ask him for a blessing.’

‘Ten thousand blessings,’ shrilled Kim. ‘O Holy One, a woman has given us in charity so that I can come with thee—a woman with a golden heart. I run for the tikkut.’

The girl looked up at the lama, who had mechanically followed Kim to the platform. He bowed his head that he might not see her, and muttered in Tibetan as she passed on with the crowd.

‘Light come—light go,’ said the cultivator’s wife viciously.

‘She has acquired merit,’ returned the lama. ‘Beyond doubt it was a nun.’

‘There be ten thousand such nuns in Amritzar alone. Return, old man, or the train may depart without thee,’ cried the banker.

‘Not only was it sufficient for the ticket, but for a little food also,’ said Kim, leaping to his place. ‘Now eat, Holy One. Look. Day comes!’

Golden, rose, saffron, and pink, the morning mists smoked away across the flat green levels. All the rich Punjab lay out in the splendour of the keen sun. The lama flinched a little as the telegraph-posts swung by.

‘Great is the speed of the train,’ said the banker, with a patronising grin. ‘We have gone farther since Lahore than thou couldst walk in two days: at even, we shall enter Umballa.’

‘And that is still far from Benares,’ said the lama wearily, mumbling over the cakes that Kim offered. They all unloosed their bundles and made their morning meal. Then the banker, the cultivator, and the soldier

KIM

prepared their pipes and wrapped the compartment in choking, acrid smoke, spitting and coughing and enjoying themselves. The Sikh and the cultivator's wife chewed pan; the lama took snuff and told his beads, while Kim, cross-legged, smiled over the comfort of a full stomach.

'What rivers have ye by Benares?' said the lama of a sudden to the carriage at large.

'We have Gunga,' returned the banker, when the little titter had subsided.

'What others?'

'What other than Gunga?'

'Nay, but in my mind was the thought of a certain River of healing.'

'That is Gunga. Who bathes in her is made clean and goes to the gods. Thrice have I made pilgrimage to Gunga.' He looked round proudly.

'There was need,' said the young sepoy drily, and the travellers' laugh turned against the banker.

'Clean—to return again to the Gods,' the lama muttered. 'And to go forth on the round of lives anew—still tied to the Wheel.' He shook his head testily. 'But maybe there is a mistake. Who, then, made Gunga in the beginning?'

'The Gods. Of what known faith art thou?' the banker said, appalled.

'I follow the Law—the Most Excellent Law. So it was the Gods that made Gunga. What like of Gods were they?'

The carriage looked at him in amazement. It was inconceivable that any one should be ignorant of Gunga.

'What—what is thy God?' said the money-lender at last.

KIM

'Hear!' said the lama, shifting the rosary to his hand.
'Hear: for I speak of Him now! O people of Hind, listen!'

He began in Urdu the tale of the Lord Buddha, but, borne by his own thoughts, slid into Tibetan and long-droned texts from a Chinese book of the Buddha's life. The gentle, tolerant folk looked on reverently. All India is full of holy men stammering gospels in strange tongues; shaken and consumed in the fires of their own zeal; dreamers, babblers, and visionaries: as it has been from the beginning and will continue to the end.

'Um!' said the soldier of the Loodhiana Sikhs. 'There was a Mohammedan regiment lay next to us at the Pirzai Kotal, and a priest of theirs,—he was, as I remember, a naik,—when the fit was on him, spake prophecies. But the mad all are in God's keeping. His officers overlooked much in that man.'

The lama fell back on Urdu, remembering that he was in a strange land. 'Hear the tale of the Arrow which our Lord loosed from the bow,' he said.

This was much more to their taste, and they listened curiously while he told it. 'Now, O people of Hind, I go to seek that River. Know ye aught that may guide me, for we be all men and women in evil case.'

'There is Gunga—and Gunga alone—who washes away sin,' ran the murmur round the carriage.

'Though past question we have good Gods Jullundur-way,' said the cultivator's wife, looking out of window. 'See how they have blessed the crops.'

'To search every river in the Punjab is no small matter,' said her husband. 'For me, a stream that leaves good silt on my land suffices, and I thank Bhumia, the God of the Homestead.' He shrugged one knotted, bronzed shoulder.

KIM

'Think you our Lord came so far north?' said the lama, turning to Kim.

'It may be,' Kim replied soothingly, as he spat red pan-juice on the floor.

'The last of the Great Ones,' said the Sikh with authority, 'was Sikander Julkarn (Alexander the Great). He paved the streets of Jullundur and built a great tank near Umballa. That pavement holds to this day; and the tank is there also. I never heard of thy God.'

'Let thy hair grow long and talk Punjabi,' said the young soldier jestingly to Kim, quoting a Northern proverb. 'That is all that makes a Sikh.' But he did not say this very loud.

The lama sighed and shrank into himself, a dingy, shapeless mass. In the pauses of their talk they could hear the low droning—'Om mane pudme hum! Om mane pudme hum!—and the thick click of the wooden rosary beads.

'It irks me,' he said at last. 'The speed and the clatter irk me. Moreover, my chela, I think that may be we have overpassed that River.'

'Peace, peace,' said Kim. 'Was not the River near Benares? We are yet far from the place.'

'But—if our Lord came north, it may be any one of these little ones that we have run across.'

'I do not know.'

'But thou wast sent to me—wast thou sent to me?—for the merit I had acquired over yonder at Suchzen. From beside the cannon didst thou come—bearing two faces—and two garbs.'

'Peace. One must not speak of these things here,' whispered Kim. 'There was but one of me. Think again and thou wilt remember. A boy—a Hindu boy—by the great green cannon.'

KIM

'But was there not also an Englishman with a white beard—holy—among images—who himself made more sure my assurance of the River of the Arrow?'

'He—we—went to the Ajaib-Gher in Lahore to pray before the gods there,' Kim explained to the openly listening company. 'And the Sahib of the Wonder House talked to him—yes, this is truth—as a brother. He is a very holy man, from far beyond the hills. Rest thou. In time we come to Umballa.'

'But my River—the River of my healing?'

'And then, if it please thee, we will go hunting for that River on foot. So that we miss nothing—not even a little rivulet in a field-side.'

'But thou hast a Search of thine own?' The lama—very pleased that he remembered so well—sat bolt upright.

'Ay,' said Kim, humouring him. The boy was entirely happy to be out chewing pan and seeing new people in the great good-tempered world.

'It was a Bull—a Red Bull that shall come and help thee—and carry thee—whither? I have forgotten. A Red Bull on a green field, was it not?'

'Nay, it will carry me nowhere,' said Kim. 'It is but a tale I told thee.'

'What is this?' the cultivator's wife leaned forward, her bracelets clinking on her arm. 'Do ye both dream dreams? A Red Bull on a green field, that shall carry thee to the Heavens—or what? Was it a vision? Did one make a prophecy? We have a Red Bull in our village behind Jullundur city, and he grazes by choice in the very greenest of our fields!'

'Give a woman an old wife's tale and a weaver-bird a leaf and a thread, they will weave wonderful things,'

KIM

said the Sikh. ‘All holy men dream dreams, and by following holy men their disciples attain that power.’

‘A Red Bull on a green field, was it?’ the lama repeated. ‘In a former life it may be thou hast acquired merit, and the Bull will come to reward thee.’

‘Nay—nay—it was but a tale one told to me—for a jest belike. But I will seek the Bull about Umballa, and thou canst look for thy River and rest from the clatter of the train.’

‘It may be that the Bull knows—that he is sent to guide us both,’ said the lama, hopefully as a child. Then to the company, indicating Kim: ‘This one was sent to me but yesterday. He is not, I think, of this world.’

‘Beggars a plenty have I met, and holy men to boot, but never such a yogi nor such a disciple,’ said the woman.

Her husband touched his forehead lightly with one finger and smiled. But the next time the lama would eat they took care to give him their best.

And at last—tired, sleepy, and dusty—they reached Umballa City Station.

‘We abide here upon a law-suit,’ said the cultivator’s wife to Kim. ‘We lodge with my man’s cousin’s younger brother. There is room also in the courtyard for thy yogi and for thee. Will—will he give me a blessing?’

‘O holy man! A woman with a heart of gold gives us lodging for the night. It is a kindly land, this land of the South. See how we have been helped since the dawn!’

The lama bowed his head in benediction.

‘To fill my cousin’s younger brother’s house with was-

KIM

trels—’ the husband began, as he shouldered his heavy bamboo staff.

‘Thy cousin’s younger brother owes my father’s cousin something yet on his daughter’s marriage-feast,’ said the woman crisply. ‘Let him put their food to that account. The yogi will beg, I doubt not.’

‘Ay, I beg for him,’ said Kim, anxious only to get the lama under shelter for the night, that he might seek Mahbub Ali’s Englishman and deliver himself of the white stallion’s pedigree.

‘Now,’ said he, when the lama had come to an anchor in the inner courtyard of a decent Hindu house behind the cantonments, ‘I go away for a while—to—to buy us victual in the bazar. Do not stray abroad till I return.’

‘Thou wilt return? Thou wilt surely return?’ The old man caught at his wrist. ‘And thou wilt return in this very same shape? Is it too late to look to-night for the River?’

‘Too late and too dark. Be comforted. Think how far thou art on the road—an hundred kos from Lahore already.’

‘Yea—and farther from my monastery. Alas! It is a great and terrible world.’

Kim stole out and away, as unremarkable a figure as ever carried his own and a few score thousand other folk’s fate slung round his neck. Mahbub Ali’s directions left him little doubt of the house in which his Englishman lived; and a groom, bringing a dog-cart home from the Club, made him quite sure. It remained only to identify his man, and Kim slipped through the garden hedge and hid in a clump of plumed grass close to the veranda. The house blazed with lights, and servants moved about tables dressed with flowers, glass,

KIM

and silver. Presently forth came an Englishman, dressed in black and white, humming a tune. It was too dark to see his face, so Kim, beggar-wise, tried an old experiment.

‘Protector of the Poor!’

The man backed towards the voice.

‘Mahbub Ali says—’

‘Hah! What says Mahbub Ali?’ He made no attempt to look for the speaker, and that showed Kim that he knew.

‘The pedigree of the white stallion is fully established.’

‘What proof is there?’ The Englishman switched at the rose-hedge in the side of the drive.

‘Mahbub Ali has given me this proof.’ Kim flipped the wad of folded paper into the air, and it fell on the path beside the man, who put his foot on it as a gardener came round the corner. When the servant passed he picked it up, dropped a rupee,—Kim could hear the clink,—and strode into the house, never turning round. Swiftly Kim took up the money; but, for all his training, he was Irish enough by birth to reckon silver the least part of any game. What he desired was the visible effect of action; so, instead of slinking away, he lay close in the grass and wormed nearer to the house.

He saw—Indian bungalows are open through and through—the Englishman return to a small dressing-room, in a corner of the veranda, that was half-office, littered with papers and despatch-boxes, and sit down to study Mahbub Ali’s message. His face, by the full ray of the kerosene lamp, changed and darkened, and Kim, used as every beggar must be to watching countenances, took good note.

‘Will! Will, dear!’ called a woman’s voice. ‘You

KIM

ought to be in the drawing-room. They'll be here in a minute.'

The man still read intently.

'Will!' said the voice, five minutes later. 'He's come. I can hear the troopers in the drive.'

The man dashed out bareheaded as a big landau with four native troopers behind it halted at the veranda, and a tall, black-haired man, erect as an arrow, swung out, preceded by a young officer who laughed pleasantly.

Flat on his belly lay Kim, almost touching the high wheels. His man and the black stranger exchanged two sentences.

'Certainly, sir,' said the young officer promptly. 'Everything waits while a horse is concerned.'

'We shan't be more than twenty minutes,' said Kim's man. 'You can do the honours—keep 'em amused, and all that.'

'Tell one of the troopers to wait,' said the tall man, and they both passed into the dressing-room together as the landau rolled away. Kim saw their heads bent over Mahbub Ali's message, and heard the voices—one low and deferential, the other sharp and decisive.

'It isn't a question of weeks. It is a question of days—hours almost,' said the elder. 'I'd been expecting it for some time, but this'—he tapped Mahbub Ali's paper—'clenches it. Grogan's dining here to-night, isn't he?'

'Yes, sir, and Macklin too.'

'Very good. I'll speak to them myself. That matter will be referred to the Council, of course, but this is a case where one is justified in assuming that we take action at once. Warn the Pindi and Peshawur brigades. It will disorganise all the summer reliefs, but

KIM

we can't help that. This comes of not smashing them thoroughly the first time. Eight thousand should be enough.'

'What about artillery, sir?'

'I must consult Macklin.'

'Then it means war?'

'No. Punishment. When a man is bound by the action of his predecessor—'

'But C.25 may have lied.'

'He bears out the other's information. Practically, they showed their hand six months back. But Devenish would have it there was a chance of peace. Of course they used it to make themselves stronger. Send off those telegrams at once,—the new code, not the old,—mine and Wharton's. I don't think we need keep the ladies waiting any longer. We can settle the rest over the cigars. I thought it was coming. It's punishment—not war.'

As the trooper cantered off Kim crawled round to the back of the house, where, going on his Lahore experiences, he judged there would be food—and information. The kitchen was crowded with excited scullions, one of whom kicked him.

'Aie,' said Kim, feigning tears. 'I came only to wash dishes in return for a bellyful.'

'All Umballa is on the same errand. Get hence. They go in now with the soup. Think you that we who serve Creighton Sahib need strange scullions to help us through a big dinner?'

'It is a very big dinner,' said Kim, looking at the plates.

'Small wonder. The guest of honour is none other than the Jang-i-Lat Sahib' (the Commander-in-Chief).

KIM

‘Ho!’ said Kim, with the correct guttural note of wonder. He had learned what he wanted, and when the scullion turned he was gone.

‘And all that trouble,’ said he to himself, thinking as usual in Hindustanee, ‘for a horse’s pedigree! Mahbub Ali should have come to me to learn a little lying. Every time before that I have borne a message it concerned a woman. Now it is men. Better. The tall man said that they will loose a great army to punish some one—somewhere—the news goes to Pindi and Peshawur. There are also guns. Would I had crept nearer. It is big news!’

He returned to find the cultivator’s cousin’s younger brother discussing the family law-suit in all its bearings with the cultivator and his wife and a few friends, while the lama dozed. After the evening meal some one passed him a water-pipe; and Kim felt very much of a man as he pulled at the smooth cocoanut-shell, his legs spread abroad in the moonlight, his tongue clicking in remarks from time to time. His hosts were most polite; for the cultivator’s wife had told them of his vision of the Red Bull, and of his probable descent from another world. Moreover, the lama was a great and venerable curiosity. The family priest, an old, tolerant Sarsut Brahmin, dropped in later, and naturally started a theological argument to impress the family. By creed, of course, they were all on their priest’s side, but the lama was the guest and the novelty. His gentle kindness, and his impressive Chinese quotations, that sounded like spells, delighted them hugely; and in this sympathetic, simple air he expanded like the Bodhisat’s own lotus, speaking of his life in the great hills of Suchzen, before, as he said, ‘I rose up to seek enlightenment.’

KIM

Then it came out that in those worldly days he had been a master-hand at casting horoscopes and nativities; and the family priest led him on to describe his methods; each giving the planets names that the other could not understand, and pointing upwards as the big stars sailed across the dark. The children of the house tugged unre-buked at his rosary; and he clean forgot the Rule which forbids looking at women as he talked of enduring snows, landslips, blocked passes, the remote cliffs where men find sapphires and turquoise, and that wonderful up-land road that leads at last into Great China itself.

‘How thinkest thou of this one?’ said the cultivator aside to the priest.

‘A holy man—a holy man indeed. His Gods are not the Gods, but his feet are upon the Way,’ was the answer. ‘And his methods of nativities, though that is beyond thee, are wise and sure.’

‘Tell me,’ said Kim lazily, ‘whether I find my Red Bull on a green field, as was promised me.’

‘What knowledge hast thou of thy birth-hour?’ the priest asked, swelling with importance.

‘Between first and second cockcrow of the first night in May.’

‘Of what year?’

‘I do not know; but upon the hour that I cried first fell the great earthquake in Srinagur which is in Kashmir.’ This Kim had from the woman who took care of him, and she again from Kimball O’Hara. The earth-quake had been felt in India, and for long stood a lead-ing date in the Punjab.

‘Ai!’ said a woman excitedly. This seemed to make Kim’s supernatural origin more certain. ‘Was not such an one’s daughter born then—’

'And her mother bore her husband four sons in four years—all likely boys,' cried the cultivator's wife, sitting outside the circle in the shadow.

'None reared in the knowledge,' said the family priest, 'forget how the planets stood in their Houses upon that night.' He began to draw in the dust of the courtyard. 'At least thou hast good claim to a half of the House of the Bull. How runs thy prophecy?'

'Upon a day,' said Kim, delighted at the sensation he was creating, 'I shall be made great by means of a Red Bull on a green field, but first there will enter two men making all things ready.'

'Yes: thus ever at the opening of a vision. A thick darkness that clears slowly; anon one enters with a broom making ready the place. Then begins the Sight. Two men—thou sayest? Ay, ay. The Sun, leaving the House of the Bull, enters that of the Twins. Hence the two men of the prophecy. Let us now consider. Fetch me a twig, little one.'

He knitted his brows, scratched, smoothed out, and scratched again in the dust mysterious signs—to the wonder of all save the lama, who, with fine instinct, forbore to interfere.

At the end of half an hour he tossed the twig from him with a grunt.

'Hm. Thus say the stars. Within three days come the two men to make all things ready. After them follows the Bull; but the sign over against him is the sign of War and armed men.'

'There was indeed a man of the Loodhiana Sikhs in the carriage from Lahore,' said the cultivator's wife hopefully.

'Tck! Armed men—many hundreds. What con-

cern hast thou with war?' said the priest to Kim. 'Thine is a red and an angry sign of War to be loosed very soon.'

'None—none,' said the lama earnestly. 'We seek only peace and our River.'

Kim smiled, remembering what he had overheard in the dressing-room. Decidedly he was a favourite of the stars.

The priest brushed his foot over the rude horoscope. 'More than this I cannot see. In three days comes the Bull to thee, boy.'

'And my River, my River,' pleaded the lama. 'I had hoped his Bull would lead us both to the River.'

'Alas, for that wondrous River, my brother,' the priest replied. 'Such things are not common.'

Next morning, though they were pressed to stay, the lama insisted on departure. They gave Kim a large bundle of good food and nearly three annas in copper money for the needs of the road, and with many blessings watched the two go southward in the dawn.

'Pity it is that these and such as these could not be freed from the Wheel of Things,' said the lama.

'Nay, then would only evil people be left on the earth, and who would give us meat and shelter?' quoth Kim, stepping merrily under his burden.

'Yonder is a small stream. Let us look,' said the lama, and he led from the white road across the fields; walking into a very hornets'-nest of pariah dogs.

CHAPTER III

‘Yea, voice of every Soul that clung
To Life that strove from rung to rung
When Devadatta’s rule was young,
The warm wind brings Kamakura.’

BEHIND them an angry farmer brandished a bamboo pole. He was a market-gardener, Arain by caste, growing vegetables and flowers for Umballa city, and well Kim knew the breed.

‘Such an one,’ said the lama, disregarding the dogs, ‘is impolite to strangers, intemperate of speech and uncharitable. Be warned by his demeanour, my disciple.’

‘Ho, shameless beggars!’ shouted the farmer. ‘Be gone! Get hence!’

‘We go,’ the lama returned, with quiet dignity. ‘We go from these unblessed fields.’

‘Ah,’ said Kim, sucking in his breath. ‘If the next crops fail, thou canst only blame thy own tongue.’

The man shuffled uneasily in his slippers. ‘The land is full of beggars,’ he began, half apologetically.

‘And by what sign didst thou know that we would beg from thee, O Mali?’ said Kim tartly, using the name that a market-gardener least likes. ‘All we sought was to look at that river beyond the field there.’

‘River, forsooth!’ the man snorted. ‘What city do ye hail from not to know a canal-cut? It runs as straight

KIM

as an arrow, and I pay for the water as though it were molten silver. There is a branch of a river beyond. But if ye need water I can give that—and milk.'

'Nay, we will go to the river,' said the lama, striding out.

'Milk and a meal,' the man stammered, as he looked at the strange tall figure. 'I—I would not draw evil upon myself—or my crops; but beggars are so many in these hard days.'

'Take notice,' the lama turned to Kim. 'He was led to speak harshly by the Red Mist of anger. That clearing from his eyes, he becomes courteous and of an affable heart. May his fields be blessed. Beware not to judge men too hastily, O farmer.'

'I have met holy ones who would have cursed thee from hearthstone to byre,' said Kim to the abashed man. 'Is he not wise and holy? I am his disciple.'

He cocked his nose in the air loftily and stepped across the narrow field-borders with great dignity.

'There is no pride,' said the lama, after a pause, 'there is no pride among such as follow the Middle Way.'

'But thou hast said he was low caste and discourteous.'

'Low caste I did not say, for how can that be which is not? Afterwards he amended his courtesy, and I forgot the offence. Moreover, he is as we are, bound upon the Wheel of Things; but he does not tread the way of deliverance.' He halted at a little runlet among the fields, and considered the hoof-pitted bank.

'Now, how wilt thou know thy River?' said Kim, squatting in the shade of some tall sugar-cane.

'When I find it, an enlightenment will surely be given. This, I feel, is not the place. O littlest among the

KIM

waters, if only thou couldst tell me where runs my River!
But be thou blessed to make the fields bear!

‘Look! Look!’ Kim sprang to his side and dragged him back. A yellow and brown streak glided from the purple rustling stems to the bank, stretched its neck to the water, drank, and lay still—a big cobra with fixed, lidless eyes.

‘I have no stick—I have no stick,’ said Kim. ‘I will get me one and break his back.’

‘Why? He is upon the Wheel as we are—a life ascending or descending—very far from deliverance. Great evil must the soul have done that is cast into this shape.’

‘I hate all snakes,’ said Kim. No native training can quench the white man’s horror of the Serpent.

‘Let him live out his life.’ The coiled thing hissed and half opened its hood. ‘May thy release come soon, brother,’ the lama continued placidly. ‘Hast thou knowledge, by chance, of my River?’

‘Never have I seen such a man as thou art,’ Kim whispered, overwhelmed. ‘Do the very snakes understand thy talk?’

‘Who knows?’ He passed within a foot of the cobra’s poised head. It flattened itself among the dusty coils.

‘Come thou!’ he called over his shoulder.

‘Not I,’ said Kim. ‘I go round.’

‘Come. He does no hurt.’

Kim hesitated for a moment. The lama backed his order by some droned Chinese quotation which Kim took for a charm. He obeyed and bounded across the rivulet, and the snake, indeed, made no sign.

‘Never have I seen such a man.’ Kim wiped the sweat from his forehead. ‘And now, whither go we?’

‘That is for thee to say. I am old, and a stranger—

KIM

far from my own place. But that the rel-carriage fills my head with noises of devil-drums I would go in it to Benares now. . . . Yet by so going we may miss the River. Let us find another river.'

Where the hard-worked soil gives three and even four crops a year—through patches of sugar-cane, tobacco, long white radishes, and nol-kol, all that day they strolled on, turning aside to every glimpse of water; rousing village dogs and sleeping villages at noonday; the lama replying to the vollied questions with an unswerving simplicity. They sought a River—a River of miraculous healing. Had any one knowledge of such a stream? Sometimes men laughed, but more often heard the story out to the end and offered them a place in the shade, a drink of milk, and a meal. The women were always kind, and the little children as children are the world over, alternately shy and venturesome. Evening found them at rest under the village tree of a mud-walled, mud-roofed hamlet, talking to the headman as the cattle came in from the grazing-grounds and the women prepared the day's last meal. They had passed beyond the belt of market-gardens round hungry Umballa, and were among the mile-wide green of the staple crops.

He was a white-bearded and affable elder, used to entertaining strangers. He dragged out a string bedstead for the lama, set warm cooked food before him, prepared him a pipe, and, the evening ceremonies being finished in the village temple, sent for the village priest.

Kim told the older children tales of the size and beauty of Lahore, of railway travel, and such-like city things, while the men talked, slowly as their cattle chew the cud.

'I cannot fathom it,' said the headman at last to the priest. 'How readest thou this talk?' The lama, his tale told, was silently telling his beads.

'He is a Seeker,' the priest answered. 'The land is full of such. Remember him who came only last month —the faqir with the tortoise?'

'Ay, but that man had right and reason, for Krishna Himself appeared in a vision promising him Paradise without the burning-pyre if he journeyed to Prayag. This man seeks no god who is within my knowledge.'

'Peace, he is old: he comes from far off, and he is mad,' the smooth-shaven priest replied. 'Hear me.' He turned to the lama. 'Three kos (six miles) to the westward runs the great road to Calcutta.'

'But I would go to Benares—to Benares.'

'And to Benares also. It crosses all streams on this side of Hind. Now my word to thee, Holy One, is rest here till to-morrow. Then take the road' (it was the Grand Trunk Road he meant) 'and test each stream that it overpasses; for, as I understand, the virtue of thy River lies neither in one pool nor place, but throughout its length. Then, if thy gods will, be assured that thou wilt come upon thy freedom.'

'That is well said.' The lama was much impressed by the plan. 'We will begin to-morrow, and a blessing on thee for showing old feet such a near road.' A deep, sing-song Chinese half-chant closed the sentence. Even the priest was impressed, and the headman feared an evil spell: but none could look at the lama's simple, eager face and doubt him long.

'Seest thou my chela?' he said, diving into his snuff-gourd with an important sniff. It was his duty to repay courtesy with courtesy.

KIM

'I see—and hear.' The headman rolled his eyes where Kim was chatting to a girl in blue as she laid crackling thorns on a fire.

'He also has a Search of his own. No river, but a Bull. Yea, a Red Bull on a green field will some day raise him to honour. He is, I think, not altogether of this world. He was sent of a sudden to aid me in this search, and his name is Friend of all the World.'

The priest smiled. 'Ho there, Friend of all the World,' he cried across the sharp-smelling smoke, 'what art thou?'

'This Holy One's disciple,' said Kim.

'He says thou art a but' (a spirit).

'Can buts eat?' said Kim, with a twinkle. 'For I am hungry.'

'It is no jest,' cried the lama. 'A certain astrologer of that city whose name I have forgotten—'

'That is no more than the city of Umballa where we slept last night,' Kim whispered to the priest.

'Ay, Umballa was it? He cast a horoscope and declared that my chela should find his desire within two days. But what said he of the meaning of the stars, Friend of all the World?'

Kim cleared his throat and looked around at the village graybeards.

'The meaning of my Star is War,' he replied pompously.

Somebody laughed at the little tattered figure strutting on the brickwork plinth under the great tree. Where a native would have lain down, Kim's white blood set him upon his feet.

'Ay, War,' he answered.

'That is a sure prophecy,' rumbled a deep voice. 'For there is always war along the Border—as I know.'

It was an old, withered man, who had served the Government in the days of the Mutiny as a native officer in a newly raised cavalry regiment. The Government had given him a good holding in the village, and though the demands of his sons, now gray-bearded officers on their own account, had impoverished him, he was still a person of consequence. English officials—Deputy Commissioners even—turned aside from the main road to visit him, and on those occasions he dressed himself in the uniform of ancient days, and stood up like a ramrod.

'But this shall be a great war—a war of eight thousand,' Kim's voice shrilled across the quick-gathering crowd, astonishing himself.

'Redcoats or our own regiments?' the old man snapped, as though he were asking an equal. His tone made men respect Kim.

'Redcoats,' said Kim at a venture. 'Redcoats and guns.'

'But—but the astrologer said no word of this,' cried the lama, snuffing prodigiously in his excitement.

'But I know. The word has come to me, who am this Holy One's disciple. There will rise a war—a war of eight thousand redcoats. From Pindi and Peshawur they will be drawn. This is sure.'

'The boy has heard bazar-talk,' said the priest.

'But he was always by my side,' said the lama. 'How should he know? I did not know.'

'He will make a clever juggler when the old man is dead,' muttered the priest to the headman. 'What new trick is this?'

'A sign. Give me a sign,' thundered the old soldier suddenly. 'If there were war my sons would have told me.'

KIM

‘When all is ready, thy sons, doubt not, will be told. But it is a long road from thy sons to the man in whose hands these things lie.’ Kim warmed to the game, for it reminded him of experiences in the letter-carrying line, when, for the sake of a few pice, he pretended to know more than he knew. But now he was playing for larger things—the sheer excitement and the sense of power. He drew a new breath and went on.

‘Old man, give me a sign. Do underlings order the goings of eight thousand redcoats—with guns?’

‘No.’ Still the old man answered as though Kim were an equal.

‘Dost thou know who He is then that gives the order?’

‘I have seen Him.’

‘To know again?’

‘I have known Him since he was a lieutenant in the topkhana’ (the Artillery).

‘A tall man. A tall man with black hair, walking thus?’ Kim took a few paces in a stiff, wooden style.

‘Ay. But that any one may have seen.’ The crowd were breathless-still through all this talk.

‘That is true,’ said Kim. ‘But I will say more. Look now. First the great man walks thus. Then He thinks thus. (Kim drew a forefinger over his forehead and downwards till it came to rest by the angle of the jaw.) Anon He twitches his fingers thus. Anon He thrusts his hat under his left armpit.’ Kim illustrated the motion and stood like a stork.

The old man groaned, inarticulate with amazement; and the crowd shivered.

‘So—so—so. But what does He when He is about to give an order?’

‘He rubs the skin at the back of his neck—thus.

KIM

Then falls one finger on the table and he makes a small sniffing noise through his nose. Then He speaks, saying: "Loose such and such a regiment. Call out such guns."

The old man rose stiffly and saluted.

"For"—Kim translated into the vernacular the clinching sentences he had heard in the dressing-room at Umballa—"For," says He, "we should have done this long ago. It is not war—it is a chastisement. Snff!"

'Enough. I believe. I have seen Him thus in the smoke of battles. Seen and heard. It is He!'

'I saw no smoke'—Kim's voice shifted to the rapt sing-song of the wayside fortune-teller. 'I saw this in darkness. First came a man to make things clear. Then came horsemen. Then came He, standing in a ring of light. The rest followed as I have said. Old man, have I spoken truth?'

'It is He. Past all doubt it is He.'

The crowd drew a long, quavering breath, staring alternately at the old man, still at attention, and ragged Kim against the purple twilight.

'Said I not—said I not he was from the other world?' cried the lama proudly. 'He is the Friend of all the World. He is the Friend of the Stars!'

'At least it does not concern us,' a man cried. 'O thou young soothsayer, if the gift abides with thee at all seasons, I have a red-spotted cow. She may be sister to thy Bull for aught I know—'

'Or I care,' said Kim. 'My Stars do not concern themselves with thy cattle.'

'Nay, but she is very sick,' a woman struck in. 'My man is a buffalo, or he would have chosen his words better. Tell me if she recover?'

KIM

Had Kim been at all an ordinary boy, he would have carried on the play; but one does not know Lahore city, and least of all the faquires by the Taksali Gate, for thirteen years without also knowing human nature.

The priest looked at him sideways, something bitterly—a dry and blighting smile.

'Is there no priest then in the village? I thought I had seen a great one even now,' cried Kim.

'Ay—but—' the woman began.

'But thou and thy husband hoped to get the cow cured for a handful of thanks.' The shot told: they were notoriously the closest-fisted couple in the village. 'It is not well to cheat the temples. Give a young calf to thy own priest, and, unless thy gods are angry past recall, she will give milk within a month.'

'A master-beggar art thou,' purred the priest approvingly. 'Not the cunning of forty years could have done better. Surely thou hast made the old man rich?'

'A little flour, a little butter and a mouthful of cardamoms,' Kim retorted, flushed with the praise, but still cautious—'does one grow rich on that? And, as thou canst see, he is mad. But it serves me while I learn the road at least.'

He knew what the faquires of the Taksali Gate were like when they talked among themselves, and copied the very inflection of their lewd disciples.

'Is his Search, then, truth or a cloak to other ends? It may be treasure.'

'He is mad—many times mad. There is nothing else.'

Here the old soldier hobbled up and asked if Kim would accept his hospitality for the night. The priest recommended him to do so, but insisted that the honour

KIM

of entertaining the lama belonged to the temple—at which the lama smiled guilelessly. Kim glanced from one face to the other, and drew his own conclusions.

‘Where is the money?’ he whispered, beckoning the old man off into the darkness.

‘In my bosom. Where else?’

‘Give it me. Quietly and swiftly give it me.’

‘But why? Here is no ticket to buy.’

‘Am I thy chela, or am I not? Do I not safeguard thy old feet about the ways? Give me the money and at dawn I will return it.’ He slipped his hand above the lama’s girdle and brought away the purse.

‘Be it so—be it so.’ The old man nodded his head. ‘This is a great and terrible world. I never knew there were so many men alive in it.’

Next morning the priest was in a very bad temper, but the lama was quite happy; and Kim had enjoyed a most interesting evening with the old man, who brought out his cavalry sabre and, balancing it on his dry knees, told tales of the Mutiny and young captains thirty years in their graves, till Kim dropped off to sleep.

‘Certainly the air of this country is good,’ said the lama. ‘I sleep lightly, as do all old men; but last night I slept unwaking till broad day. Even now I am heavy.’

‘Drink a draught of hot milk,’ said Kim, who had carried not a few such remedies to opium-smokers of his acquaintance. ‘It is time to take the road again.’

‘The long road that overpasses all the rivers of Hind,’ said the lama gaily. ‘Let us go. But how thinkest thou, chela, to recompense these people, and especially the priest, for their great kindness? Truly they are but-parast, but in other lives, may be, they will receive enlightenment. A rupee to the temple? The thing

KIM

within is no more than stone and red paint, but the heart of man we must acknowledge when and where it is good.'

'Holy One, hast thou ever taken the road alone?' Kim looked up sharply, like the Indian crows so busy about the fields.

'Surely, child: from Kulu to Pathankot—from Kulu, where my first chela died. When men were kind to us we made offerings, and all men were well-disposed throughout all the Hills.'

'It is otherwise in Hind,' said Kim drily. 'Their gods are many-armed and malignant. Let them alone.'

'I would set thee on thy road for a little, Friend of all the World—thou and thy yellow man.' The old soldier ambled up the village street, all shadowy in the dawn, on a gaunt, scissor-hocked pony. 'Last night broke up the fountains of remembrance in my so-dried heart, and it was as a blessing to me. Truly there is war abroad in the air. I smell it. See! I have brought my sword.'

He sat long-legged on the little beast, with the big sword at his side, hand dropped on the pommel,—staring fiercely over the flat lands towards the north. 'Tell me again how He showed in thy vision. Come up and sit behind me. The beast will carry two.'

'I am this Holy One's disciple,' said Kim, as they cleared the village-gate. The villagers seemed almost sorry to be rid of them, but the priest's farewell was cold and distant. He had wasted some opium on a man who carried no money.

'That is well spoken. I am not much used to holy men, but respect is always good. There is no respect in these days—not even when a Commissioner Sahib

KIM

comes to see me. But why should one whose Star leads him to war follow a holy man?’

‘But he is a holy man,’ said Kim earnestly. ‘In truth, and in talk and in act, holy. He is not like the others. I have never seen such an one. We be not fortune-tellers, or jugglers, or beggars.’

‘Thou art not, that I can see; but I do not know that other. He marches well, though.’

The first freshness of the day carried the lama forward with long, easy, camel-like strides. He was deep in meditation, mechanically clicking his rosary.

They followed the rutted and worn country road that wound across the flat between the great dark-green mango-groves, the line of the snow-capped Himalayas faint to the eastward. All India was at work in the fields, to the creaking of well-wheels, the shouting of ploughmen behind their cattle, and the clamour of the crows. Even the pony felt the good influence and almost broke into a trot as Kim laid a hand on the stirrup-leather.

‘It repents me that I did not give a rupee to the shrine,’ said the lama on the last bead of his eighty-one.

The old soldier growled in his beard, so that the lama for the first time was aware of him.

‘Seekest thou the River also?’ said he, turning.

‘The day is new,’ was the reply. ‘What need of a river save to water at before sundown? I come to show thee a short lane to the Big Road.’

‘That is a courtesy to be remembered, O man of good will; but why the sword?’

The old soldier looked as abashed as a child interrupted in his game of make-believe.

‘The sword’ he said, fumbling it. ‘Oh, that was a

KIM

fancy of mine—an old man's fancy. Truly the police orders are that no man must bear weapons throughout Hind, but—he cheered up and slapped the hilt—'all the constabeels hereabout know me.'

'It is not a good fancy,' said the lama. 'What profit to kill men?'

'Very little—as I know; but if evil men were not now and then slain it would not be a good world for weaponless dreamers. I do not speak without knowledge who have seen the land from Delhi south awash with blood.'

'What madness was that, then?'

'The Gods, who sent it for a plague, alone know. A madness ate into all the Army, and they turned against their officers. That was the first evil, but not past remedy if they had then held their hands. But they chose to kill the Sahibs' wives and children. Then came the Sahibs from over the sea and called them to most strict account.'

'Some such rumour, I believe, reached me once long ago. They called it the Black Year, as I remember.'

'What manner of life hast thou led, not to know The Year? A rumour indeed! All earth knew, and trembled.'

'Our earth never shook but once—upon the day that the Excellent One received Enlightenment.'

'Umph! I saw Delhi shake at least; and Delhi is the navel of the world.'

'So they turned against women and children? That was a bad deed, for which the punishment cannot be avoided.'

'Many strove to do so, but with very small profit. I was then in a regiment of cavalry. It broke. Of six hundred and eighty sabres stood fast to their salt—how many think you? Three. Of whom I was one.'

‘The greater merit.’

‘Merit! We did not consider it merit in those days. My people, my friends, my brothers fell from me. They said: “The time of the English is accomplished. Let each strike out a little holding for himself.” But I had talked with the men of Sobraon, of Chillianwallah, of Moodkee and Ferozeshah. I said: “Abide a little and the wind turns. There is no blessing in this work.” In those days I rode seventy miles with an English mem-sahib and her babe on my saddle-bow. (Wow! That was a horse fit for a man!) I placed them in safety, and back came I to my officer—the one that was not killed of our five. “Give me work,” said I, “for I am an outcast among my own kin, and my cousin’s blood is wet on my sabre.” “Be content,” said he. “There is great work forward. When this madness is over there is a recompense.”’

‘Ay, there is a recompense when the madness is over, surely?’ the lama muttered half to himself.

‘They did not hang medals in those days on all who by accident had heard a gun fired. No! In nineteen pitched battles was I; in six-and-forty skirmishes of horse; and in small affairs without number. Nine wounds I bear; a medal and four clasps and the medal of an Order, for my captains who are now generals, remembered me when the Kaiser-i-Hind had accomplished fifty years of her reign, and all the land rejoiced. They said: “Give him the order of Berittish India.” I carry it upon my neck now. I have also my jaghir (holding) from the hands of the State—a free gift to me and mine. The men of the old days—they are now Commissioners—come riding to me through the crops,—high upon horses so that all the village sees,—and we

KIM

talk out the old skirmishes, one dead man's name leading to another.'

'And after?' said the lama.

'Oh, afterwards they go away, but not before my village has seen.'

'And at the last what wilt thou do?'

'At the last I shall die.'

'And after?'

'Let the Gods order it. I have never pestered Them with prayers: I do not think they will pester me. Look you, I have noticed in my long life that those who eternally break in upon Those Above with complaints and reports and bellowings and weepings are presently sent for in haste, as our colonel used to send for slack-jawed down-country men who talked too much. No, I have never wearied the Gods. They will remember this, and give me a quiet place where I can drive my lance in the shade, and wait to welcome my sons: I have no less than three—ressaldar-majors all—in the regiments.'

'And they likewise, bound upon the Wheel, go forth from life to life—from despair to despair,' said the lama below his breath, 'hot, uneasy, snatching.'

'Ay,' the old soldier chuckled. 'Three ressaldar-majors in three regiments. Gamblers a little, but so am I. They must be well mounted; and one cannot take the horses as in the old days one took women. Well, well, my holding can pay for all. How thinkest thou? It is a well-watered strip, but my men cheat me. I do not know how to ask save at the lance's point. Ugh! I grow angry and I curse them, and they feign penitence, but behind my back I know they call me a toothless old ape.'

'Hast thou never desired any other thing?'

‘Yes—yes—a thousand times! A straight back and a close-clinging knee once more; a quick wrist and a keen eye; and the marrow that makes a man. Oh, the old days—the good days of my strength!’

‘That strength is weakness.’

‘It has turned so; but fifty years since I could have proved it otherwise,’ the old soldier retorted, driving his stirrup-edge into the pony’s lean flank.

‘But I know a River of great healing.’

‘I have drunk Gunga-water to the edge of dropsy. All she gave me was a flux, and no sort of strength.’

‘It is not Gunga. The River that I know washes from all taint of sin. Ascending the far bank one is assured of Freedom. I do not know thy life, but thy face is the face of the honourable and courteous. Thou hast clung to thy Way, rendering fidelity when it was hard to give, in that Black Year of which I now remember other tales. Enter now upon the Middle Way, which is the path to Freedom. Hear the Most Excellent Law, and do not follow dreams.’

‘Speak then, old man,’ the soldier smiled, half saluting. ‘We be all babblers at our age.’

The lama squatted under the shade of a mango, whose shadow played checkerwise over his face; the soldier sat stiffly on the pony; and Kim, making sure that there were no snakes, lay down in the crotch of the twisted roots.

There was a drowsy buzz of small life in hot sunshine, a cooing of doves, and a sleepy drone of well-wheels across the fields. Slowly and impressively the lama began. At the end of ten minutes the old soldier slid from his pony, to hear better as he said, and sat with the reins round his wrist. The lama’s voice faltered—the

periods lengthened. Kim was busy watching a gray squirrel. When the little scolding bunch of fur, close pressed to the branch, disappeared, preacher and audience were fast asleep, the old officer's strong-cut head pillow'd on his arm, the lama's thrown back against the tree bole, where it show'd like yellow ivory. A naked child toddled up, stared, and, moved by some quick impulse of reverence made a solemn little obeisance before the lama—only the child was so short and fat that it toppled over sideways, and Kim laughed at the sprawling, chubby legs. The child, scared and indignant, yelled aloud.

'Hai! Hai!' said the soldier leaping to his feet. 'What is it? What orders? . . . It is . . . a child! I dreamed it was an alarm. Little one—little one—do not cry. Have I slept? That was discourteous indeed!'

'I fear! I am afraid!' roared the child.

'What is it to fear? Two old men and a boy? How wilt thou ever make a soldier, Princeling?'

The lama had waked too, but, taking no direct notice of the child, clicked his rosary.

'What is that?' said the child, stopping a yell midway. 'I have never seen such things. Give them me.'

'Aha,' said the lama, smiling, and trailing a loop of it on the grass:

'This is a handful of cardamoms,
This is a lump of ghi:
This is millet and chillies and rice,
A supper for thee and me!'

The child shrieked with joy, and snatched at the dark, glancing beads.

KIM

‘Oho!’ said the old soldier. ‘Whence had thou that song, despiser of this world?’

‘I learned it in Pathankot—sitting on a door-step,’ said the lama shyly. ‘It is good to be kind to babes.’

‘As I remember, before the sleep came on us, thou hadst told me that marriage and bearing were darkeners of the true light, stumbling-blocks upon the way. Do children drop from heaven in thy country? Is it the Way to sing them songs?’

‘No man is all perfect,’ said the lama gravely, recoiling the rosary. ‘Run now to thy mother, little one.’

‘Hear him!’ said the soldier to Kim. ‘He is ashamed for that he has made a child happy. There was a very good householder lost in thee, my brother. Hai, child!’ He threw it a pice. ‘Sweetmeats are always sweet.’ And as the little figure capered away into the sunshine: ‘They grow up and become men. Holy One, I grieve that I slept in the midst of thy preaching. Forgive me.’

‘We be two old men,’ said the lama. ‘The fault is mine. I listened to thy talk of the world and its madness, and one fault led to the next.’

‘Hear him! What harm do thy Gods suffer from play with a babe? And that song was very well sung. Let us go on and I will sing thee the song of Nikal Seyn before Delhi—the old song.’

And they fared out from the gloom of the mango tope, the old man’s high, shrill voice ringing across the field, as wail by long-drawn wail he unfolded the story of Nikal Seyn (Nicholson)—the song that men sing in the Punjab to this day. Kim was delighted, and the lama listened with deep interest.

‘Ahi! Nikal Seyn is dead—he died before Delhi!

KIM

Lances of North take vengeance for Nikal Seyn.' He quavered it out to the end, marking the trills with the flat of his sword on the pony's rump.

'And now we come to the Big Road,' said he, after receiving the compliments of Kim; for the lama was markedly silent. 'It is long since I have ridden this way, but thy boy's talk stirred me. See, Holy One—the Great Road which is the backbone of all Hind. For the most part it is shaded, as here, with four lines of trees; the middle road—all hard—takes the quick traffic. In the days before rail-carriages the Sahibs travelled up and down here in hundreds. Now there are only country-carts and such like. Left and right is the rougher road for the heavy carts—grain and cotton and timber, bhoosa, lime and hides. A man goes in safety here—for at every few kos is a police-station. The police are thieves and extortioners (I myself would patrol it with cavalry—young recruits under a strong captain), but at least they do not suffer any rivals. All castes and kinds of men move here. Look! Brahmins and chumars, bankers and tinkers, barbers and bunnias, pilgrims and potters—all the world going and coming. It is to me as a river from which I am withdrawn like a log after a flood.'

And truly the Grand Trunk Road is a wonderful spectacle. It runs straight, bearing without crowding India's traffic for fifteen hundred miles—such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world. They looked at the green-arched, shade-flecked length of it, the white breadth speckled with slow-pacing folk; and the two-roomed police-station opposite.

'Who bears arms against the law?' a constable called out laughingly, as he caught sight of the soldier's sword. 'Are not the police enough to destroy evil-doers?'

KIM

'It was because of the police I bought it,' was the answer. 'Does all go well in Hind?'

'Ressaldar Sahib, all goes well.'

'I am like an old tortoise, look you, who puts his head out from the bank and draws it in again. Ay, this is the road of Hindustan. All men come by this way. . . .'

'Son of a swine, is the soft part of the road meant for thee to scratch thy back upon? Father of all the daughters of shame and husband of ten thousand virtueless ones, thy mother was devoted to a devil, being led thereto by her mother; thy aunts have never had a nose for seven generations! Thy sister— What owl's folly told thee to draw thy carts across the road? A broken wheel? Then take a broken head and put the two together at leisure!'

The voice and a venomous whip-cracking came out of a pillar of dust fifty yards away, where a cart had broken down. A thin, high Kattiwar mare, with eyes and nostrils aflame, rocketed out of the jam, snorting and wincing as her rider bent her across the road in chase of a shouting man. He was tall and gray-bearded, sitting the almost mad beast as a piece of her, and scientifically lashing his victim between plunges.

The old man's face lit with pride. 'My child!' said he briefly, and strove to rein the pony's neck to a fitting arch.

'Am I to be beaten before the police?' cried the carter. 'Justice! I will have Justice—'

'Am I to be blocked by a shouting ape who upsets ten thousand sacks under a young horse's nose? That is the way to ruin a mare.'

'He speaks truth. He speaks truth. But she follows

KIM

her man close,' said the old man. The carter ran under the wheels of his cart and thence threatened all sorts of vengeance.

'They are strong men, thy sons,' said the policeman serenely, picking his teeth.

The horseman delivered one last vicious cut with his whip and came on at a canter.

'My father!' He reined back ten yards and dismounted.

The old man was off his pony in an instant, and they embraced as do father and son in the East.

CHAPTER IV

Good Luck, she is never a lady,
But the cursedest quean alive.
Tricksy, wincing, and jady—
Kittle to lead or drive.
Greet her—she's hailing a stranger!
Meet her—she's busking to leave!
Let her alone for a shrew to the bone
And the hussy comes plucking your sleeve!

Largesse! Largesse, O Fortune!
Give or hold at your will
If I've no care for Fortune,
Fortune must follow me still!

‘The Wishing Caps.’

THEN, lowering their voices, they spoke together. Kim came to rest under a tree, but the lama tugged impatiently at his elbow.

‘Let us go on. The River is not here.’

‘Hai mai? Have we not walked enough for a little? Our River will not run away. Patience, and he will give us a dole.’

‘That,’ said the old soldier suddenly, ‘is the Friend of the Stars. He brought me the news yesterday. Having seen the very man Himself, in a vision, giving orders for the war.’

KIM

'Hm!' said his son, all deep in his broad chest. 'He came by a bazar-rumour and made profit of it.'

His father laughed. 'At least he did not ride to me begging for a new charger and the gods know how many rupees. Are thy brothers' regiments also under orders?'

'I do not know. I took leave and came swiftly to thee in case—'

'In case they ran before thee to beg. O gamblers and spendthrifts all! But thou hast never yet ridden in a charge. A good horse is needed there, truly. A good follower and a good pony also for the marching. Let us see—let us see.' He thrummed on the pommel.

'This is no place to cast accounts in, my father. Let us go to thy house.'

'At least pay the boy then: I have no pice with me, and he brought auspicious news. Ho! Friend of all the World, a war is toward as thou hast said.'

'Nay, as I know, the war,' returned Kim composedly.

'Eh?' said the lama, fingering his beads, all eager for the road.

'My master does not trouble the Stars for hire. We brought the news—bear witness we brought the news, and now we go.' Kim half-crooked his hand at his side.

The son tossed a silver coin through the sunlight, grumbling something about beggars and jugglers. It was a four-anna piece, and would feed them well for some days. The lama, seeing the flash of the metal, droned a blessing.

'Go thy way, Friend of all the World,' piped the old soldier, wheeling his scrawny mount. 'For once in all my days I have met a true prophet—who was not in the Army.'

KIM

Father and son swung round together: the old man sitting as erect as the younger.

A Punjabi constable in yellow linen trousers slouched across the road. He had seen the money pass.

'Halt!' he cried in impressive English. 'Know ye not that there is a takkus of two annas a head, which is four annas, on those who enter the road from this side-road. It is the order of the Sirkar, and the money is spent for the planting of trees and the beautification of the ways.'

'And the bellies of the police,' said Kim, skipping out of arm's reach. 'Consider for a while, man with a mud head. Think you we came from the nearest pond like the frog, thy father-in-law. Hast thou ever heard the name of thy brother?'

'And who was he? Leave the boy alone,' cried a senior constable, immensely delighted, as he squatted down to smoke his pipe in the veranda.

'He took a label from a bottle of belaitee-pani (soda-water), and, affixing it to a bridge, collected taxes for a month from those who passed, saying that it was the Sirkar's order. Then came an Englishman and broke his head. Ah, brother, I am a town-crow, not a village-crow!'

The policeman drew back abashed, and Kim hooted at him all down the road.

'Was there ever such a disciple as I?' he cried merrily to the lama. 'All earth would have picked thy bones within ten mile of Lahore city if I had not guarded thee.'

'I consider in my own mind whether thou art a spirit, sometimes, or sometimes an evil imp,' said the lama, smiling slowly.

'I am thy chela.' Kim dropped into step at his side —that indescribable gait of the long-distance tramp all the world over.

KIM

'Now let us walk,' muttered the lama, and to the click of his rosary they walked in silence mile upon mile. The lama, as usual, was deep in meditation, but Kim's bright eyes were open wide. This broad, smiling river of life, he considered, was a vast improvement on the cramped and crowded Lahore streets. There were new people and new sights at every stride—castes he knew and castes that were altogether out of his experience.

They met a troop of long-haired, strong-scented Sansis with baskets of lizards and other unclean food on their backs, their lean dogs sniffing at their heels. These people kept their own side of the road, moving at a quick, furtive jog-trot, and all other castes gave them ample room; for the Sansi is deep pollution. Behind them, walking wide and stiffly across the strong shadows, the memory of his leg-irons still on him, strode one newly released from the jail; his full stomach and shiny skin to prove that the Government fed its prisoners better than most honest men could feed themselves. Kim knew that walk well, and made broad jest of it as they passed. Then an Akali, a wild-eyed, wild-haired Sikh devotee in the blue-checked clothes of his faith, with polished-steel quoits glistening on the cone of his tall blue turban, stalked past, returning from a visit to one of the independent Sikh States, where he had been singing the ancient glories of the Khalsa to College-trained princelings in top-boots and white-cord breeches. Kim was careful not to irritate that man; for the Akali's temper is short and his arm quick. Here and there they met or were overtaken by the gaily dressed crowds of whole villages turning out to some local fair; the women, with their babes on their hips, walking behind the men, the older boys prancing on sticks of sugar-cane.

dragging rude brass models of locomotives such as they sell for a halfpenny, or flashing the sun into the eyes of their betters from cheap toy mirrors. One could see at a glance what each had bought; and if there were any doubt it needed only to watch the wives comparing, brown arm against brown arm, the newly purchased dull glass bracelets that come from the North-West. These merry-makers stepped slowly, calling one to the other and stopping to haggle with sweetmeat-sellers, or to make a prayer before one of the wayside shrines—sometimes Hindu, sometimes Mussalman—which the low caste of both creeds share with beautiful impartiality. A solid line of blue, rising and falling like the back of a caterpillar in haste, would swing up through the quivering dust and trot past to a chorus of quick cackling. That was a gang of changars—the women who have taken all the embankments of all the Northern railways under their charge—a flat-footed, big-bosomed, strong-limbed, blue-petticoated clan of earth-carriers, hurrying north on news of a job, and wasting no time by the road. They belong to the caste whose men do not count, and they walked with squared elbows, swinging hips, and heads on high, as suits women who carry heavy weights. A little later a marriage procession would strike into the Grand Trunk with music and shoutings, and a smell of marigold and jasmine stronger even than the reek of the dust. One could see the bride's litter, a blur of red and tinsel, staggering through the haze, while the bridegroom's bewreathed pony turned aside to snatch a mouthful from a passing fodder-cart. Then Kim would join the Kentish-fire of good wishes and bad jokes, wishing the couple a hundred sons and no daughters, as the saying is. Still more

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interesting and more to be shouted over it was when a strolling juggler with some half-trained monkeys, or a panting, feeble bear, or a woman who tied goats' horns to her feet, and with these danced on a slack-rope, set the horses to shying and the women to shrill, long-drawn quavers of amazement.

The lama never raised his eyes. He did not note the money-lender on his goose-rumped pony, hastening along to collect the cruel interest; or the long-shouting, deep-voiced little mob--still in military formation--of native soldiers on leave, rejoicing to be rid of their breeches and puttees, and saying the most outrageous things to the most respectable women in sight. Even the seller of Ganges-water he did not see, and Kim expected that he would at least buy a bottle of that precious stuff. He looked steadily at the ground, and strode as steadily hour after hour, his soul busied elsewhere. But Kim was in the seventh heaven of joy. The Grand Trunk at this point was built on an embankment to guard against winter floods from the foothills, so that one walked, as it were, a little above the country, along a stately corridor, seeing all India spread out to left and right. It was beautiful to behold the many-yoked grain and cotton waggons crawling over the country-roads: one could hear their axles, complaining a mile away, coming nearer, till with shouts and yells and bad words they climbed up the steep incline and plunged on to the hard main road, carter reviling carter. It was equally beautiful to watch the people, little clumps of red and blue and pink and white and saffron, turning aside to go to their own villages, dispersing and growing small by twos and threes across the level plain. Kim felt these things, though he could not give tongue to his

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feelings, and so contented himself with buying peeled sugar-cane and spitting the pith generously about his path. From time to time the lama took snuff, and at last Kim could endure the silence no longer.

‘This is a good land—the land of the South!’ said he. ‘The air is good; the water is good. Eh?’

‘And they are all bound upon the Wheel,’ said the lama. ‘Bound from life after life. To none of these has the Way been shown.’ He shook himself back to this world.

‘And now we have walked a weary way,’ said Kim. ‘Surely we shall soon come to a parao (a resting-place). Shall we stay there? Look, the sun is sloping.’

‘Who will receive us this evening?’

‘That is all one. This country is full of good folk. Besides,—he sunk his voice beneath a whisper,—‘we have money.’

The crowd thickened as they neared the resting-place which marked the end of their day’s journey. A line of stalls selling very simple food and tobacco, a stack of firewood, a police-station, a well, a horse-trough, a few trees, and, under them, some trampled ground dotted with the black ashes of old fires, are all that mark a parao on the Grand Trunk; if you except the beggars and the crows—both hungry.

By this time the sun was driving broad golden spokes through the lower branches of the mango trees; the parakeets and doves were coming home in their hundreds; the chattering, gray-backed Seven Sisters, talking over the day’s adventures, walked back and forth in twos and threes almost under the feet of the travellers; and shufflings and scufflings in the branches showed that the bats were ready to go out on the night-picket.

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Swiftly the light gathered itself together, painted for an instant the faces and the cart-wheels and the bullocks' horns as red as blood. Then the night fell, changing the touch of the air, drawing a low, even haze, like a gossamer veil of blue, across the face of the country, and bringing out, keen and distinct, the smell of wood-smoke and cattle and the good scent of wheaten cakes cooked on ashes. The evening patrol hurried out of the police-station with important coughings and reiterated orders; and a live charcoal ball in the cup of a wayside carter's hookah glowed red while Kim's eye mechanically watched the last flicker of the sun on the brass tweezers.

The life of the parao was very like that of the Kashmir Serai on a small scale. Kim dived into the happy Asiatic disorder which, if you only allow time, will bring you everything that a simple man needs.

His wants were few, because, since the lama had no caste scruples, cooked food from the nearest stall would serve; but, for luxury's sake, Kim bought a handful of dung-cakes to build a fire. All about, coming and going round the little flames, men cried for oil, or grain, or sweetmeats, or tobacco, jostling one another while they waited their turn at the well; and under the men's voices you heard from halted, shuttered carts the high squeals and giggles of women whose faces should not be seen in public.

Nowadays, well-educated natives are of opinion that when their womenfolk travel—and they visit a good deal—it is better to take them quickly by rail in a properly screened compartment; and that custom is spreading. But there are always those of the old rock who hold by the use of their forefathers; and, above all,

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there are always the old women,—more conservative than the men,—who toward the end of their days go a pilgrimage. They, being withered and undesirable, do not, under certain circumstances, object to unveiling. After their long seclusion, during which they have always been in business touch with a thousand outside interests, they love the bustle and stir of the open road, the gatherings at the shrines, and the infinite possibilities of gossip with like-minded dowagers. Very often it suits a long-suffering family that a strong-tongued, iron-willed old lady should disport herself about India in this fashion; for certainly pilgrimage is grateful to the Gods. So all about India, in the most remote places, as in the most public, you find some knot of grizzled servitors in nominal charge of an old lady who is more or less curtained and hid away in a bullock-cart. Such men are staid and discreet, and when a European or a high-caste native is near will net their charge with most elaborate precautions; but in the ordinary haphazard chances of pilgrimage the precautions are not taken. The old lady is, after all, intensely human, and lives to look upon life.

Kim marked down a gaily ornamented routh or family bullock-cart, with a broidered canopy of two domes, like a double-humped camel, which had just been drawn into the parao. Eight men made its retinue, and two of the eight were armed with rusty sabres—sure signs that they followed a person of distinction, for the common folk do not bear arms. An increasing cackle of complaints, orders, and jests, and what to a European would have been bad language, came from behind the curtains. Here was evidently a woman used to command.

Kim looked over the retinue critically. Half of them were thin-legged, gray-bearded Ooryas from down

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country. The other half were duffle-clad, felt-hatted hillmen of the North: and that mixture told its own tale, even if he had not overheard the incessant sparring between the two divisions. The old lady was going south on a visit—probably to a rich relative, most probably to a son-in-law, who had sent up an escort as a mark of respect. The hillmen would be of her own people—Kulu or Kangra folk. It was quite clear that she was not taking her daughter down to be wedded, or the curtains would have been laced home and the guard would have allowed no one near the car. A merry and a high-spirited dame, thought Kim, balancing the dung-cake in one hand, the cooked food in the other, and piloting the lama with a nudging shoulder. Something might be made out of the meeting. The lama would give him no help, but, as a conscientious chela, Kim was delighted to beg for two.

He built his fire as close to the cart as he dared, waiting for one of the escort to order him away. The lama dropped wearily to the ground, much as a heavy fruit-eating bat cowers, and returned to his rosary.

'Stand farther off, beggar!' The order was shouted in broken Hindustanee by one of the hillmen.

'Huh! It is only a pahari' (a hillman), said Kim over his shoulder. 'Since when have the hill-asses owned all Hindustan?'

The retort was a swift and brilliant sketch of Kim's pedigree for three generations.

'Ah!' Kim's voice was sweeter than ever, as he broke the dung-cake into fit pieces. 'In my country we call that the beginning of love-talk.'

A harsh, thin cackle behind the curtains put the hillman on his mettle for a second shot.

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‘Not so bad—not so bad,’ said Kim with calm. ‘But have a care, my brother, lest we—we, I say—be minded to give a curse or so in return. And our curses have the knack of biting home.’

The Ooryas laughed; the hillman sprang forward threateningly; the lama suddenly raised his head, bringing his huge tam-o’-shanter cap into the full light of Kim’s new-started fire.

‘What is it?’ said he.

The man halted as though struck to stone. ‘I—I—am saved from a great sin,’ he stammered.

‘The foreigner has found him a priest at last,’ whispered one of the Ooryas.

‘Hai! Why is that beggar-brat not well beaten?’ the old woman cried.

The hillman drew back to the cart and whispered something to the curtain. There was dead silence, then a muttering.

‘This goes well,’ thought Kim, pretending neither to see nor hear.

‘When—when—he has eaten,—the hillman fawned on Kim—‘it—it is requested that the Holy One will do the honour to talk to one who would speak to him.’

‘After he has eaten he will sleep,’ Kim returned loftily. He could not quite see what new turn the game had taken, but stood resolute to profit by it. ‘Now, I will get him his food.’ The last sentence, spoken loudly, ended with a sigh as of faintness.

‘I—I myself and the others of my people will look to that—if it is permitted.’

‘It is permitted,’ said Kim, more loftily than ever. ‘Holy One, these people will bring us food.’

‘The land is good. All the country of the South is

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good—a great and a terrible world,’ mumbled the lama drowsily.

‘Let him sleep,’ said Kim, ‘but look to it that we are well fed when he wakes. He is a very holy man.’

Again one of the Ooryas said something contemptuously.

‘He is not a faquir. He is not a down-country beggar,’ Kim went on severely, addressing the stars. ‘He is the most holy of holy men. He is above all castes. I am his chela.’

‘Come here!’ said the flat thin voice behind the curtain; and Kim came, conscious that eyes he could not see were staring at him. One skinny brown finger heavy with rings lay on the edge of the cart, and the talk went this way:

‘Who is that one?’

‘An exceedingly holy one. He comes from far off. He comes from Tibet.’

‘Where in Tibet?’

‘From behind the snows—from a very far place. He knows the stars; he makes horoscopes; he reads nativities. But he does not do this for money. He does it for kindness and great charity. I am his disciple. I am called also the Friend of the Stars.’

‘Thou art no hillman.’

‘Ask him. He will tell thee I was sent to him from the stars to show him an end to his pilgrimage.’

‘Humph! Consider, brat, that I am an old woman and not altogether a fool. Lamas I know, and to these I give reverence, but thou art no more a lawful chela than this my finger is the pole of this waggon. Thou art a casteless Hindu—a bold and unblushing beggar, attached, belike, to the Holy One for the sake of gain.’

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‘Do we not all work for gain?’ Kim changed his tone promptly to match that altered voice. ‘I have heard’—this was a bow drawn at a venture—‘I have heard—’

‘What hast thou heard?’ she snapped, rapping with the finger.

‘Nothing that I well remember, but some talk in the bazars, which is doubtless a lie, that even Rajahs—small hill Rajahs—’

‘But none the less of good Rajput blood.’

‘Assuredly of good blood. That these even sell the more comely of their womenfolk for gain. Down south they sell them—to zemindars and such-all of Oudh.

If there be one thing in the world that the small hill Rajahs deny it is just this charge; but it happens to be one thing that the bazars believe, when they discuss the mysterious slave-traffics of India. The old lady explained to Kim, in a tense, indignant whisper, precisely what manner and fashion of malignant liar he was. Had Kim hinted this when she was a girl, he would have been pommelled to death that same evening by an elephant. This was perfectly true.

‘Ahai! I am only a beggar’s brat, as the Eye of Beauty has said,’ he wailed in extravagant terror.

‘Eye of Beauty, forsooth! Who am I that thou shouldst fling beggar-endearments at me?’ And yet she laughed at the long-forgotten word. ‘Forty years ago that might have been said, and not without truth. Ay, thirty years ago. But it is the fault of this gadding up and down Hind that a king’s widow must jostle all the scum of the land, and be made a mock by beggars.’

‘Great Queen,’ said Kim promptly, for he heard her shaking with indignation, ‘I am even what the Great

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Queen says I am; but none the less is my master holy.
He has not yet heard the Great Queen's order that—'

'Order? I order a Holy One—a Teacher of the Law
—to come and speak to a woman? Never!'

'Pity my stupidity. I thought it was given as an
order—'

'It was not. It was a petition. Does this make all
clear?'

A silver coin clicked on the edge of the cart. Kim
took it and salaamed profoundly. The old lady recog-
nised that, as the eyes and the ears of the lama, he was
to be propitiated.

'I am but the Holy One's disciple. When he has
eaten perhaps he will come.'

'Oh, villain and shameless rogue!' The jewelled
forefinger shook itself at him reprovingly; but he could
hear the old lady's chuckle.

'Nay, what is it?' he said, dropping into his most
caressing and confidential tone—the one, he well knew,
that few could resist. 'Is—is there any need of a son
in thy family? Speak freely, for we priests—' That
last was a direct plagiarism from a faquir by the Taksali
Gate.

'We priests! Thou art not yet old enough to—'
She checked the joke with another laugh. 'Believe me,
now and again, we women, O priest, think of other
matters than sons. Moreover, my daughter has borne
her man-child.'

'Two arrows in the quiver are better than one; and
three are better still.' Kim quoted the proverb with a
meditative cough, looking discreetly earthward.

'True—oh, true. But perhaps that will come.
Certainly those down-country Brahmins are utterly use-

less. I sent gifts and monies and gifts again to them, and they prophesied.'

'Ah,' drawled Kim, with infinite contempt, 'they prophesied!' A professional could have done no better.

'And it was not till I remembered my own Gods that my prayers were heard. I chose an auspicious hour, and —perhaps thy Holy One has heard of the Abbot of the Lung-Cho lamassery. It was to him I put the matter, and behold in the due time all came about as I desired. The Brahmin in the house of the father of my daughter's son has since said that it was through his prayers—which is a little error that I will explain to him when we reach our journey's end. And so afterwards I go to Buddh Gaya, to make shraddha for the father of my children.'

'Thither go we.'

'Doubly auspicious,' chirruped the old lady. 'A second son at least!'

'O Friend of all the World!' The lama had waked, and, simply as a child bewildered in a strange bed, called for Kim.

'I come! I come, Holy One!' He dashed to the fire, where he found the lama already surrounded by dishes of food, the hillmen visibly adoring him and the South-erners looking sourly.

'Go back! Withdraw!' Kim cried. 'Do we eat publicly like dogs?' They finished the meal in silence, each turned a little from the other, and Kim topped it with a native-made cigarette.

'Have I not said an hundred times that the South is a good land? Here is a virtuous and high-born widow of a Hill Rajah on pilgrimage, she says, to Buddh Gaya. She it is sends us those dishes; and when thou art well rested she would speak to thee.'

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‘Is this also thy work?’ The lama dipped deep into his snuff-gourd.

‘Who else watched over thee since our wonderful journey began?’ Kim’s eyes danced in his head as he blew the rank smoke through his nostrils and stretched him on the dusty ground. ‘Have I failed to oversee thy comforts, Holy One?’

‘A blessing on thee.’ The lama inclined his solemn head. ‘I have known many men in my so long life, and disciples not a few. But to none among men, if so be thou art woman-born, has my heart gone out as it has to thee—thoughtful, wise, and courteous, but something of a small imp.’

‘And I have never seen such a priest as thou.’ Kim considered the benevolent yellow face wrinkle by wrinkle. ‘It is less than three days since we took road together, and it is as though it were a hundred years.’

‘Perhaps in a former life it was permitted that I should have rendered thee some service. May be’—he smiled—‘I freed thee from a trap; or, having caught thee on a hook in the days when I was not enlightened, cast thee back into the river.’

‘May be,’ said Kim quietly. He had heard this sort of speculation again and again, from the mouths of many whom the English would not consider imaginative. ‘Now, as regards that woman in the bullock-cart, I think she needs a second son for her daughter.’

‘That is no part of the Way,’ sighed the lama. ‘But at least she is from the Hills. Ah, the Hills, and the snow of the Hills!’

He rose and stalked to the cart. Kim would have given his ears to come too, but the lama did not invite him; and the few words he caught were in an unknown

tongue, for they spoke some common speech of the mountains. The woman seemed to ask questions which the lama turned over in his mind before answering. Now and again he heard the sing-song cadence of a Chinese quotation. It was a strange picture that Kim watched between drooped eyelids. The lama, very straight and erect, the deep folds of his yellow clothing slashed with black in the light of the parao fires precisely as a knotted tree-trunk is slashed with the shadow of the long sun, addressed a tinsel and lacquered routh which burned like a many-coloured jewel in the same uncertain light. The patterns on the gold-worked curtains ran up and down, melting and re-forming as the folds shook and quivered to the night wind; and when the talk grew more earnest the jewelled forefinger snapped out little sparks of light between the embroideries. Behind the cart was a wall of uncertain darkness speckled with little flames and alive with half-caught forms and faces and shadows. The voices of early evening had settled down to one soothing hum whose deepest note was the steady chumping of the bullocks above their chopped straw, and whose highest was the tinkle of a Bengali dancing-girl's sitar. Most men had eaten and pulled deep at their gurgling, grunting hookahs, which in full blast sound like bull-frogs.

At last the lama returned. A hillman walked behind him with a wadded cotton-quilt and spread it carefully by the fire.

'She deserves ten thousand grandchildren,' thought Kim. 'None the less, but for me, these gifts would not have come.'

'A virtuous woman—and a wise one.' The lama slackened off, joint by joint, like a slow camel. 'The

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world is full of charity to those who follow the Way.' He flung a fair half of the quilt over Kim.

'And what said she?' Kim rolled up in his share of it.

'She asked me many questions and propounded many problems—the most of which were idle tales which she had heard from devil-serving priests who pretend to follow the Way. Some I answered, and some I said were foolish. Many wear the Robe, but few keep the Way.'

'True. That is true.' Kim used the thoughtful, conciliatory tone of those who wish to draw confidences.

'But by her lights she is most right-minded. She desires greatly that we should go with her to Buddh Gaya; her road being ours, as I understand, for many days' journey to the southward.'

'And?'

'Patience a little. To this I said that my Search came before all things. She had heard many foolish legends, but this great truth of my River she had never heard. Such are the priests of the lower hills! She knew the Abbot of Lung-Cho, but she did not know of my River—nor the tale of the Arrow.'

'And?'

'I spoke therefore of the Search, and of the Way, and of matters that were profitable; she desiring only that I should accompany her and make prayer for a second son.'

'Aha! "We women" do not think of anything save children,' said Kim sleepily.

'Now, since our roads run together for a while, I do not see that we in any way depart from our Search if so be we accompany her—at least as far as—I have forgotten the name of the city.'

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‘Ohe!’ said Kim, turning and speaking in a sharp whisper to one of the Ooryas a few yards away. ‘Where is your master’s house?’

‘A little behind Saharunpore, among the fruit gardens.’ He named the village.

‘That was the place,’ said the lama. ‘So far, at least, we can go with her.’

‘Flies go to carrion,’ said the Oorya, in an abstracted voice.

‘For the sick cow a crow; for the sick man a Brahmin.’ Kim breathed the proverb impersonally to the shadow-tops of the trees overhead.

The Oorya grunted and held his peace.

‘So then we go with her, Holy One?’

‘Is there any reason against? I can still step aside and try all the rivers that the road overpasses. She desires that I should come. She very greatly desires it.’

Kim stifled a laugh in the quilt. When once that imperious old lady had recovered from her natural awe of a lama he thought it probable that she would be worth listening to.

He was nearly asleep when the lama suddenly quoted a proverb: ‘The husbands of the talkative have a great reward hereafter.’ Then Kim heard him snuff thrice, and dozed off, still laughing.

The diamond-bright dawn woke men and crows and bullocks together. Kim sat up and yawned, shook himself, and thrilled with delight. This was seeing the world in real truth; this was life as he would have it—bustling and shouting, the buckling of belts, and beating of bullocks and creaking of wheels, lighting of fires and cooking of food, and new sights at every turn of the approving eye. The morning mist swept off in a whorl

of silver, the parrots shot away to some distant river in shrieking green hosts: all the well-wheels within earshot went to work. India was awake, and Kim was in the middle of it, more awake and more excited than any one, chewing on a twig that he would presently use as a toothbrush; for he borrowed right- and left-handedly from all the customs of the country he knew and loved. There was no need to worry about food—no need to spend a cowrie at the crowded stalls. He was the disciple of a holy man annexed by a strong-willed old lady. All things would be prepared for them, and when they were respectfully invited so to do they would sit and eat. For the rest,—Kim giggled here as he cleaned his teeth,—his hostess would rather heighten the enjoyment of the road. He inspected her bullocks critically, as they came up grunting and blowing under the yokes. If they went too fast—it was not likely—there would be a pleasant seat for himself along the pole; the lama would sit beside the driver. The escort, of course, would walk. The old lady, equally of course, would talk a great deal, and by what he had heard that conversation would not lack salt. She was already ordering, haranguing, rebuking, and, it must be said, cursing her servants for delays.

‘Get her her pipe. In the name of the Gods, get her her pipe and stop her ill-omened mouth,’ cried an Oorya, tying up his shapeless bundles of bedding. ‘She and the parrots are alike. They screech in the dawn.’

‘The lead-bullocks! Hai! Look to the lead-bullocks!’ They were backing and wheeling as a grain-cart’s axle caught them by the horns. ‘Son of an owl, where dost thou go?’ This to the grinning carter.

‘Ai! Yai! Yai! That within there is the Queen of

Delhi going to pray for a son,' the man called back over his high load. 'Room for the Queen of Delhi and her prime minister the gray monkey climbing up his own sword!' Another cart loaded with bark for a down-country tannery followed close behind, and its driver added a few compliments as the ruth-bullocks backed and backed again.

From behind the shaking curtains came one volley of invective. It did not last long, but in kind and quality, in blistering, biting appropriateness, it was beyond anything that even Kim had heard. He could see the carter's bare chest collapse with amazement, as the man salaamed reverently to the voice, leaped from the pole, and helped the escort haul their volcano on to the main road. Here the voice told him truthfully what sort of wife he had wedded, and what she was doing in his absence.

'Oh, shabash!' murmured Kim, unable to contain himself, as the man slunk away.

'Well done, indeed? It is a shame and a scandal that a poor woman may not go to make prayer to her gods except she be jostled and insulted by all the refuse of Hindustan—that she must eat gali (abuse) as men eat ghi. But I have yet a wag left to my tongue—a word or two well spoken that serves the occasion. And still am I without my tobacco! Who is the one-eyed and luckless son of shame that has not yet prepared my pipe?'

It was hastily thrust in by a hillman, and a trickle of thick smoke from each corner of the curtains showed that peace was restored.

If Kim had walked proudly the day before, disciple of a holy man, to-day he paced with tenfold pride in the train of a semi-royal procession, with a recognised place

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under the patronage of an old lady of charming manners and infinite resource. The escort, their heads tied up native fashion, fell in on either side the cart, shuffling enormous clouds of dust.

The lama and Kim walked a little to one side; Kim chewing his stick of sugar-cane, and making way for no one under the status of a priest. They could hear the old lady's tongue clack as steadily as a rice-husker. She bade the escort tell her what was going on on the road; and so soon as they were clear of the parao she flung back the curtains and peered out, her veil a third across her face. Her men did not eye her directly when she addressed them, and thus the proprieties were more or less observed.

A dark, sallowish District Superintendent of Police, faultlessly uniformed, an Englishman, trotted by on a tired horse, and, seeing from her retinue what manner of person she was, chaffed her.

'O mother,' he cried, 'do they do this in the zenanas? Suppose an Englishman came by and saw that thou hadst no nose?'

'What?' she shrilled back. 'Thy own mother has no nose? Why say so, then, on the open road?'

It was a fair counter. The Englishman threw up his hand with the gesture of a man hit at sword-play. She laughed and nodded.

'Is this a face to tempt virtue aside?' She withdrew all her veil and stared at him.

It was by no means lovely, but as the man gathered up his reins he called it a Moon of Paradise, a Disturber of Integrity, and a few other fantastic epithets which doubled her up with mirth.

'That is a nut-cut' (rogue), she said. 'All police-

constables are nut-cuts; but the police-wallahs are the worst. Hai, my son, thou hast never learned all that since thou camest from Belait (Europe). Who suckled thee?"

'A pahareen—a hillwoman of Dalhousie, my mother. Keep thy beauty under a shade—O Dispenser of Delights,' and he was gone.

'These be the sort'—she took a fine judicial tone, and stuffed her mouth with pan. 'These be the sort to oversee justice. They know the land and the customs of the land. The others, all new from Europe, suckled by white women and learning our tongues from books, are worse than the pestilence. They do harm to Kings.' Then she told a long, long tale to the world at large, of an ignorant young policeman who had disturbed some small Hill Rajah, a ninth cousin of her own, in the matter of a trivial land-case, winding up with a quotation from a work by no means devotional.

Then her mood changed, and she bade one of the escort ask whether the lama would walk alongside and discuss matters of religion. So Kim dropped back into the dust and returned to his sugar-cane. For an hour or more the lama's tam-o'-shanter showed like a moon through the haze; and, from all he heard, Kim gathered that the old woman wept. One of the Ooryas half apologised for his rudeness overnight, saying that he had never known his mistress of so bland a temper, and he ascribed it to the presence of the strange priest. Personally, he believed in Brahmins, though, like all natives, he was acutely aware of their cunning and their greed. Still, when Brahmins but irritated with begging demands the mother of his master's wife, and when she sent them away so angry that they cursed the whole

retinue (which was the real reason of the second off-side bullock going lame, and of the pole breaking the night before), he was prepared to accept any priest of any other denomination in or out of India. To this Kim assented with wise nods, and bade the Oorya observe that the lama took no money, and that the cost of his and Kim's food would be repaid a hundred times in the good luck that would attend the caravan henceforward. He also told stories of Lahore city, and sang a song or two which made the escort laugh. As a town-mouse well acquainted with the latest songs by the most fashionable composers,—they are women for the most part,—Kim had a distinct advantage over men from a little fruit-village behind Saharunpore, but he let that advantage be inferred.

At noon they turned aside to eat, and the meal was good, plentiful, and well served on plates of clean leaves, in decency, out of drift of the dust. They gave the scraps to certain beggars, that all requirements might be fulfilled, and sat down to a long, luxurious smoke. The old lady had retreated behind her curtains, but mixed most freely in the talk, her servants arguing with and contradicting her as servants do throughout the East. She compared the cool and the pines of the Kangra and Kuiu hills with the dust and the mangoes of the South; she told a tale of some old local Gods at the edge of her husband's territory; she roundly abused the tobacco which she was then smoking, reviled all Brahmins, and speculated without reserve on the coming of many grandsons.

CHAPTER V

Here come I to my own again—
Fed, forgiven, and known again—
Claimed by bone of my bone again,
 And sib to flesh of my flesh!
The fatted calf is dressed for me,
But the husks have greater zest for me
I think my pigs will be best for me,
 So I'm off to the styes afresh.

‘The Prodigal Son.’

ONCE more the lazy, string-tied, shuffling procession got under way, and she slept till they reached the next halting-stage. It was a very short march, and time lacked an hour to sundown, so Kim cast about for means of amusement.

‘But why not sit and rest?’ said one of the escort.
‘Only the devils and the English walk to and fro without reason.’

‘Never make friends with the Devil, a monkey, or a boy. No man knows what they will do next,’ said his fellow.

Kim turned a scornful back—he did not want to hear the old story how the Devil played with the boys and repented of it—and walked idly across country.

The lama strode after him. All that day, whenever they passed a stream, he had turned aside to look at it, but in no case had he received any warning that he had

KIM

found his River. Insensibly too the comfort of speaking to some one in a reasonable tongue, and of being properly considered and respected as her spiritual adviser by a well-born woman, had weaned his thoughts a little from the Search. And further, he was prepared to spend serene years in his quest; having nothing of the white man's impatience, but a great faith.

'Where goest thou?' he called after Kim.

'No whither—it was a small march, and all this'—Kim waved his hands abroad—'is new to me.'

'She is beyond question a wise and a discerning woman. But it is hard to meditate when—'

'All women are thus.' Kim spoke as might have Solomon.

'Before the lamassery was a broad platform,' the lama muttered, looping up the well-worn rosary, 'of stone. On that I have left the marks of my feet—pac-ing to and fro with these.'

He clicked the beads, and began the 'Om mane pudme hum' of his devotion; grateful for the cool, the quiet, and the absence of dust.

One thing after another drew Kim's idle eye across the plain. There was no purpose in his wanderings, except that the build of the huts near by seemed new, and he wished to investigate.

They came out on a broad tract of grazing-ground, brown and purple in the afternoon light, with a heavy clump of mangoes in the centre. It struck Kim as curious that no shrine stood in so eligible a spot: the boy was observing as any priest for these things. Far across the plain walked side by side four men, made small by the distance. He looked intently under his curved palms and caught the sheen of brass.

KIM

‘Soldiers. White soldiers!’ said he. ‘Let us see.’

‘It is always soldiers when thou and I go out alone together. But I have never seen the white soldiers.’

‘They do no harm except when they are drunk. Keep behind this tree.’

They stepped behind the thick trunks in the cool dark of the mango-tope. Two little figures halted; the other two came forward uncertainly. They were the advance-party of a regiment on the march, sent out, as usual, to mark the camp. They bore five-foot sticks with fluttering flags, and called to each other as they spread over the flat earth.

At last they entered the mango-grove, walking heavily.

‘It’s here or hereabouts—officers’ tents under the trees, I take it, an’ the rest of us can stay outside. Have they marked out for the baggage-waggons behind?’

They cried again to their comrades in the distance, and the rough answer came back faint and mellowed.

‘Shove the flag in here, then,’ said one.

‘What do they prepare?’ said the lama, wonder-struck. ‘This is a great and terrible world. What is the device on the flag?’

A soldier thrust a stave within a few feet of them, grunted discontentedly, pulled it up again, conferred with his companion, who looked up and down the shaded cave of greenery, and returned it.

Kim stared with all his eyes, his breath coming short and sharp between his teeth. The soldiers stamped off into the sunshine.

‘O Holy One,’ he gasped, ‘my horoscope! The drawing in the dust by the priest at Umballa! Remember

KIM

what he said. First come two—ferashes—to make all things ready—in a dark place, as it is always at the beginning of a vision.'

'But this is not vision,' said the lama. 'It is the world's Illusion, and no more.'

'And after them comes the Bull—the Red Bull on the green field. Look! It is he!'

He pointed to the flag that was snap-snapping in the evening breeze not ten feet away. It was no more than an ordinary camp marking-flag; but the regiment, always punctilious in matters of millinery, had charged it with the regimental device, the Red Bull, which is the crest of the Mavericks—the great Red Bull on a background of Irish green.

'I see, and now I remember,' said the lama. 'Certainly it is thy Bull. Certainly, also, the two men came to make all ready.'

'They are soldiers—white soldiers. What said the priest? "The sign over against the Bull is the sign of War and armed men." Holy One, this thing touches my Search.'

'True. It is true.' The lama stared fixedly at the device that flamed like a ruby in the dusk. 'The priest at Umballa said that thine was the sign of War.'

'What is to do now?'

'Wait. Let us wait.'

'Even now the darkness clears,' said Kim. It was only natural that the descending sun should at last strike through the tree-trunks, across the grove, filling it with mealy gold light for a few minutes; but to Kim it was crown of the Umballa Brahmin's prophecy.

'Hark!' said the lama. 'One beats a drum—far off!'

At first the sound, carrying diluted through the still

KIM

air, resembled the beating of an artery in the head. Soon a sharpness was added.

‘Ah! The music,’ Kim explained. He knew the sound of a regimental band, but it amazed the lama.

At the far end of the plain a heavy, dusty column crawled in sight. Then the wind brought the tune:—

‘We crave your condescension
To tell you what we know
Of marching in the Mulligan Guards
To Sligo Port below.’

Here broke in the shrill-tongued fifes:—

‘We shouldered arms,
We marched—we marched away
From Phoenix Park
We marched to Dublin Bay.
The drums and the fifes,
Oh, sweetly they did play,

As we marched—marched—marched—with the Mulligan Guards!’

It was the band of the Mavericks playing the regiment to camp; for the men were route-marching with their baggage. The rippling column swung into the level—carts behind it—divided left and right, ran about like an ant-hill, and . . .

‘But this is sorcery!’ said the lama.

The plain dotted itself with tents that seemed to rise, all spread, from the carts. Another rush of men invaded the grove, pitched a huge tent in silence, ran up yet eight or nine more by the side of it, unearthed cooking-pots, pans, and bundles, which were taken possession of by a

KIM

crowd of native servants; and behold the mango-topes turned into an orderly town as they watched!

‘Let us go,’ said the lama, sinking back afraid, as the fires twinkled and white officers with jingling swords stalked into the mess-tent.

‘Stand back in the shadow. No one can see beyond the light of a fire,’ said Kim, his eyes still on the flag. He had never before watched the routine of a seasoned regiment pitching camp in thirty minutes.

‘Look! look! look!’ clucked the lama. ‘Yonder comes a priest.’

It was Bennett, the Church of England chaplain of the regiment, limping in dusty black. One of his flock had made some rude remarks about the chaplain’s mettle; and to abash him Bennett had marched step by step with the men that day. The black dress, gold cross on the watch-chain, the hairless face, and the soft, black wideawake hat would have marked him as a holy man anywhere in all India. He dropped into a camp-chair by the door of the mess-tent and slid off his boots. Three or four officers gathered round him, laughing and joking over his exploit.

‘The talk of white men is wholly lacking in dignity,’ said the lama, who judged only by tone. ‘But I have considered the countenance of that priest, and I think he is learned. Is it likely that he will understand our talk? I would talk to him of my Search.’

‘Never speak to a white man till he is fed,’ said Kim, quoting a well-known proverb. ‘They will eat now, and—and I do not think they are good to beg from. Let us go back to the resting-place. After we have eaten we will come again. It certainly was a Red Bull—my Red Bull.’

KIM

They were both noticeably absent-minded when the old lady's retinue set their meal before them; so none broke their reserve, for it is not lucky to annoy guests.

'Now,' said Kim, picking his teeth, 'we will return to that place; but thou, O Holy One, must wait a little way off, because thy feet are heavier than mine and I am anxious to see more of that Red Bull.'

'But how canst thou understand the talk? Walk slowly. The road is dark,' the lama replied uneasily.

Kim put the question aside. 'I marked a place near to the trees,' said he, 'where thou canst sit till I call. Nay,' as the lama made some sort of protest, 'remember this is my Search—the Search for my Red Bull. The sign in the Stars was not for thee. I know a little of the customs of white soldiers, and I always desire to see some new things.'

'What dost thou not know of this world?' The lama squatted obediently in a little hollow of the ground not a hundred yards from the hump of the mango trees dark against the star-powdered sky.

'Stay till I call.' Kim flitted into the dusk. He knew that in all probability there would be sentries round the camp, and smiled to himself as he heard the thick boots of one. A boy who can dodge over the roofs of Lahore city on a moonlight night, using every little patch and corner of darkness to discomfit his pursuer, is not likely to be checked by a line of well-trained soldiers. He paid them the compliment of crawling between a couple, and, running and halting, crouching and dropping flat, worked his way toward the lighted mess-tent where, close pressed behind the mango tree, he waited till some chance word should give him a returnable lead.

The one thing in his mind now was further informa-

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tion as to the Red Bull. For aught he knew, and Kim's limitations were as curious and sudden as his expansions, the men, the nine hundred thorough devils of his father's prophecy, might pray to the beast after dark, as Hindus pray to the Holy Cow. That at least would be entirely right and logical, and the Padre with the gold cross would be therefore the man to consult in the matter. On the other hand, remembering sober-faced padres whom he had avoided in Lahore city, the priest might be an inquisitive nuisance who would bid him learn. But had it not been proven at Umballa that his sign in the high heavens portended war and armed men? Was he not the Friend of the Stars as well as of all the world, crammed to the teeth with dreadful secrets? Lastly,—and firstly as the undercurrent of all his quick thoughts,—this adventure, though he did not know the English word, was a stupendous lark—a delightful continuation of his old flights across the housetops, as well as the fulfilment of sublime prophecy. He lay belly-flat and wriggled towards the mess-tent door, a hand on the amulet round his neck.

It was as he suspected. The Sahibs prayed to their God; for in the centre of the mess-table—its sole ornament when they were on the line of march—stood a golden bull fashioned from old-time loot of the Summer Palace at Pekin—a red-gold bull with lowered head, ramping upon a field of Irish green. To him the Sahibs held out their glasses and cried aloud confusedly.

Now the Reverend Arthur Bennett always left mess after that toast, and being rather tired by his march his movements were more abrupt than usual. Kim, with slightly raised head, was still staring at his totem on the table, when the chaplain stepped on his right shoulder-

blade. Kim flinched under the leather, and, rolling sideways, brought down the chaplain, who, ever a man of action, caught him by the throat and nearly choked the life out of him. Kim then kicked him desperately in the stomach. Mr. Bennett gasped and doubled up but without relaxing his grip, rolled over again, and silently hauled Kim to his own tent. The Mavericks were incurable practical jokers; and it occurred to the Englishman that silence was best till he had made complete inquiry.

‘Why, it’s a boy!’ he said, as he drew his prize under the light of the tent-pole lantern, then shaking him severely cried: ‘What were you doing? You’re a thief. Choor? Mallum?’ His Hindustanee was very limited, and the ruffled and disgusted Kim intended to keep to the character laid down for him. As he recovered his breath he was inventing a beautifully plausible tale of his relations to some mess-scullion, and at the same time keeping a keen eye on and a little under the chaplain’s left armpit. The chance came; he ducked for the doorway, but a long arm shot out and clutched at his neck, snapping the amulet string and closing on the amulet.

‘Give it me. O give it me. Is it lost? Give me the papers.’

The words were in English—the tinny, saw-cut English of the native-bred, and the chaplain jumped.

‘A scapular,’ said he, opening his hand. ‘No, some sort of heathen charm. Why—why, do you speak English? Little boys who steal are beaten. You know that?’

‘I do not—I did not steal.’ Kim danced in agony like a terrier at a lifted stick. ‘O give it me. It is my charm. Do not thieve it from me.’

KIM

The chaplain took no heed, but, going to the tent door, called aloud. A fattish, clean-shaven man appeared.

'I want your advice, Father Victor,' said Bennett. 'I found this boy in the dark outside the mess-tent. Ordinarily, I should have chastised him and let him go, because I believe him to be a thief. But it seems he talks English, and he attaches some sort of value to a charm round his neck. I thought perhaps you might help me.'

Between himself and the Roman Catholic chaplain of the Irish contingent lay, as Bennett believed, an unbridgeable gulf, but it was noticeable that whenever the Church of England dealt with a human problem she was likely to call in the Church of Rome. Bennett's official abhorrence of the Scarlet Woman and all her ways was only equalled by his private respect for Father Victor.

'A thief talking English is it? Let's look at his charm. No, it's not a scapular, Bennett.' He held out his hand.

'But have we any right to open it? A sound whipping—'

'I did not thieve,' protested Kim. 'You have hit me kicks all over my body. Now give me my charm and I will go away.'

'Not quite so fast; we'll look first,' said Father Victor, leisurely rolling out poor Kimball O'Hara's 'ne varietur' parchment, his clearance-certificate, and Kim's baptismal certificate. On this last O'Hara—with some confused idea that he was doing wonders for his son—had scrawled scores of times: 'Look after the boy. Please look after the boy,'—signing his name and regimental number in full.

'Powers of Darkness below!' said Father Victor,

KIM

passing all over to Mr. Bennett. ‘Do you know what these things are?’

‘Yes,’ said Kim. ‘They are mine, and I want to go away.’

‘I do not quite understand,’ said Mr. Bennett. ‘He probably brought them on purpose. It may be a begging trick of some kind.’

‘I never saw a beggar less anxious to stay with his company, then. There’s the makings of a gay mystery here. Ye believe in Providence, Bennett?’

‘I hope so.’

‘Well, I believe in miracles, so it comes to the same thing. Powers of Darkness! Kimball O’Hara! And his son! But then he’s a native, and I saw Kimball married myself to Annie Shott. How long have you had these things, boy?’

‘Ever since I was a little baby.’ Father Victor stepped forward quickly and opened the front of Kim’s upper garment. ‘You see, Bennett, he’s not very black. What’s your name?’

‘Kim.’

‘Or Kimball?’

‘Perhaps. Will you let me go away?’

‘What else?’

‘They call me Kim Rishti ke. That is Kim of the Rishti.’

‘What is that—“Rishti”?’

‘Eye-rishti—that was the regiment—my father’s.’

‘Irish, oh I see.’

‘Yess. That was how my father told me. My father, he has lived.’

‘Has lived where?’

‘Has lived. Of course he is dead—gone-out.’

'Oh. That's your abrupt way of putting it, is it?'

Bennett interrupted. 'It is possible I have done the boy an injustice. He is certainly white, though evidently neglected. I am sure I must have bruised him. I do not think spirits—'

'Get him a glass of sherry, then, and let him squat on the cot. Now, Kim,' continued Father Victor, 'no one is going to hurt you. Drink that down and tell us about yourself. The truth, if you've no objection.'

Kim coughed a little as he put down the empty glass, and considered. This seemed a time for caution and fancy. Small boys who prowl about camps are generally turned out after a whipping. But he had received no stripes; the amulet was evidently working in his favour, and it looked as though the Umballa horoscope and the few words that he could remember of his father's maunderings fitted in most miraculously. Else why did the fat padre seem so impressed, and why the glass of hot yellow wine from the lean one?

'My father, he is dead in Lahore city since I was very little. The woman, she kept kabarri-shop near where the hire-carriages are.' Kim began with a plunge, not quite sure how far the truth would serve him.

'Your mother?'

'No'—with a gesture of disgust. 'She went out when I was born. My father, he got these papers from the Jadoo-Gher—what do you call that?' (Bennett nodded) 'because he was in—good-standing. What do you call that?' (again Bennett nodded). 'My father told me that. He said too, and also the Brahmin who made the drawing in the dust at Umballa two days ago, he said, that I shall find a Red Bull on a green field and that the Bull shall help me.'

'A phenomenal little liar,' muttered Bennett.

'Powers of Darkness below, what a country!' murmured Father Victor. 'Go on, Kim.'

'I did not thieve. Besides, I am just now disciple of a very holy man. He is sitting outside. We saw two men come with flags, making the place ready. That is always so in a dream, or on account of a—a—prophecy. So I knew it was come true. I saw the Red Bull on the green field, and my father he said: "Nine hundred pukka devils and the Colonel riding on a horse will look after you when you find the Red Bull!"' I did not know what to do when I saw the Bull, but I went away and I came again when it was dark. I wanted to see the Bull again, and I saw the Bull again with the—the Sahibs praying to it. I think the Bull shall help me. The holy man said so too. He is sitting outside. Will you hurt him, if I call him a shout now? He is very holy. He can witness to all the things I say, and he knows I am not a thief.'

"Officers praying to a bull!" What in the world do you make of that?" said Bennett. "'Disciple of a holy man!' Is the boy mad?"

'It's O'Hara's boy, sure enough. O'Hara's boy leagued with all the Powers of Darkness. It's very much what his father would have done—if he was drunk. We'd better invite the holy man. He may know something.'

'He does not know anything,' said Kim. 'I will show you him if you come. He is my master. Then afterwards we can go.'

'Powers of Darkness!' was all that Father Victor could say, as Bennett marched off, with a firm hand on Kim's shoulder.

They found the lama where he had dropped.

'The Search is at an end for me,' shouted Kim in the vernacular. 'I have found the Bull, but God knows what comes next. They will not hurt you. Come to the fat priest's tent with this thin man and see the end. It is all new, and they cannot talk Hindi. They are only uncurried donkeys.'

'Then it is not well to make a jest of their ignorance,' the lama returned. 'I am glad if thou art rejoiced, chela.'

Dignified and unsuspicious, he strode into the little tent, saluted the Churches as a Churchman, and sat down by the open charcoal brazier. The yellow lining of the tent reflected in the lamplight made his face red-gold.

Bennett looked at him with the triple-ringed uninterest of the creed that lumps nine-tenths of the world under the title of 'heathen.'

'And what was the end of the search? What gift has the Red Bull brought?' The lama addressed himself to Kim.

'He says, "What are you going to do?"' Bennett was staring uneasily at Father Victor, and Kim, for his own ends, took upon himself the office of interpreter.

'I do not see what concern this faqir has with the boy, who is probably his dupe or his confederate,' Bennett began. 'We cannot allow an English boy— Assuming that he is the son of a Mason, the sooner he goes to the Masonic Orphanage the better.'

'Ah! That's your opinion as Secretary to the Regimental Lodge,' said Father Victor; 'but we might as well tell the old man what we are going to do. He doesn't look like a villain.'

KIM

‘My experience is that one can never fathom the Oriental mind. Now, Kimball, I wish you to tell this man what I say—word for word.’

Kim gathered the import of the next few sentences and began thus:

‘Holy One, the thin fool who looks like a camel says that I am the son of a Sahib.’

‘But how?’

‘Oh, it is true. I knew it since my birth, but he could only find it out by rending the amulet from my neck and reading all the papers. He thinks that once a Sahib is always a Sahib, and between the two of them they purpose to keep me in this regiment or to send me to a madrissah (a school). It has happened before. I have always avoided it. The fat fool is of one mind and the camel-like one of another. But that is no odds. I may spend one night here and perhaps the next. It has happened before. Then I will run away and return to thee.’

‘But tell them that thou art my chela. Tell them how thou didst come to me when I was faint and bewildered. Tell them of our Search, and they will surely let thee go now.’

‘I have already told them. They laugh, and they talk of the Police.’

‘What are you saying?’ asked Mr. Bennett.

‘Oah. He only says that if you do not let me go it will stop him in his business—his ur-gent private affairs.’ This last was a reminiscence of some talk with a Eurasian clerk in the Canal Department, but it only drew a smile, which nettled him. ‘And if you did know what his business was you would not be in such a beastly hurry to interfere.’

KIM

‘What is it then?’ said Father Victor, not without feeling, as he watched the lama’s face.

‘There is a River in this country which he wishes to find so verree much. It was put out by an Arrow which—’ Kim tapped his foot impatiently as he translated in his own mind from the vernacular to his clumsy English. ‘Oah, it was made by our Lord God Buddha, you know, and if you wash there you are washed away from all your sins and made as white as cotton-wool.’ (Kim had heard mission-talk in his time.) ‘I am his disciple, and we must find that River. It is so verree valuable to us.’

‘Say that again,’ said Bennett. Kim obeyed, with amplifications.

‘But this is gross blasphemy!’ cried the Church of England.

‘Tck! Tck!’ said Father Victor sympathetically. ‘I’d give a good deal to be able to talk the vernacular. A river that washes away sin! And how long have you two been looking for it?’

‘Oh, many days. Now we wish to go away and look for it again. It is not here, you see.’

‘I see,’ said Father Victor gravely. ‘But he can’t go on in that old man’s company. It would be different, Kim, if you were not a soldier’s son. Tell him that the regiment will take care of you and make you as good a man as your—as good a man as can be. Tell him that if he believes in miracles he must believe that—’

‘There is no need to play on his credulity,’ Bennett interrupted.

‘I’m doing no such thing. He must believe that the boy’s coming here—to his own regiment—in search of his Red Bull is in the nature of a miracle. Consider the

chances against it, Bennett. This one boy in all India, and our regiment of all others on the line o' march for him to meet with! It's predestined on the face of it. Yes, tell him it's Kismet. Kismet, mallum?' (Fate! Do you understand?)

He turned towards the lama, to whom he might as well have talked of Mesopotamia.

'They say,'—the old man's eye lighted at Kim's speech,—'they say that the meaning of my horoscope is now accomplished, and that being led back—though as thou knowest I went out of curiosity—to these people and their Red Bull I must needs go to a madrissah and be turned into a Sahib. Now I make pretence of agreement, for at the worst it will be but a few meals eaten away from thee. Then I will slip away and follow down the road to Saharunpore. Therefore, Holy One, keep with that Kulu woman—on no account stray far from her cart till I come again. Past question, my sign is of War and of armed men. See how they have given me wine to drink and set me upon a bed of honour! My father must have been some great person. So if they raise me to honour among them, good. If not, good again. However it goes, I will run back to thee when I am tired. But stay with the Rajputni, or I shall miss thy feet. . . . Oah yess,' said the boy, 'I have told him everything you tell me to say.'

'And I cannot see any need why he should wait,' said Bennett, feeling in his trouser-pocket. 'We can investigate the details later—and I will give him a ru—'

'Give him time. May be he's fond of the lad,' said Father Victor, half-arresting the clergyman's motion.

The lama dragged forth his rosary and pulled his huge hat-brim over his eyes.

KIM

‘What can he want now?’

‘He says’—Kim put up one hand. ‘He says: Be quiett. He wants to speak to me by himself. You see you do not know one little word of what he says, and I think if you talk he will perhaps give you very bad curses. When he takes those beads like that, you see he always wants to be quiett.’

The two Englishmen sat overwhelmed, but there was a look in Bennett’s eye that promised ill for Kim when he should be relaxed to the religious arm.

‘A Sahib and the son of a Sahib—’ The lama’s voice was harsh with pain. ‘But no white man knows the land and the customs of the land as thou knowest. How comes it this is true?’

‘What matter, Holy One: but remember it is only for a night or two. Remember, I can change swiftly. It will all be as it was when I first spoke to thee under Zam-Zammah the great gun—’

‘As a boy in the dress of white men—when I first went to the Wonder House. And a second time thou wast a Hindu. What shall the third incarnation be?’ He chuckled drearily. ‘Ah, chela, thou hast done a wrong to an old man because my heart went out to thee.’

‘And mine to thee. But how could I know that the Red Bull would bring me to this business?’

The lama covered his face afresh, and nervously rattled the rosary. Kim squatted beside him and laid hold upon a fold of his clothing.

‘Now it is understood that the boy is a Sahib?’ he went on in a muffled tone. ‘Such a Sahib as was he who kept the images in the Wonder House.’ The lama’s experience of white men was limited. He seemed to be repeating a lesson. ‘So then it is not seemly that he

KIM

should do other than as the Sahibs do. He must go back to his own people.'

'For a day and a night and a day,' Kim pleaded.

'No, ye don't!' Father Victor saw Kim edging towards the door, and interposed a strong leg.

'I do not understand the customs of white men. The Priest of the Images in the Wonder House in Lahore was more courteous than the thin one here. This boy will be taken from me. They will make a Sahib of my disciple? Woe to me, how shall I find my River? Have they no disciples? Ask.'

'He says he is very sorry that he cannot find the River now any more. He says, Why have you no disciples, and stop bothering him? He wants to be washed of his sins.'

Neither Bennett nor Father Victor found any answer ready.

Said Kim in English, distressed for the lama's agony: 'I think if you will let me go now we will walk away quietly and not steal. We will look for that River like before I was caught. I wish I did not come here to find the Red Bull and all that sort of thing. I do not want it.'

'It's the very best day's work you ever did for yourself, young man,' said Bennett.

'Good heavens, I don't know how to console him,' said Father Victor, watching the lama intently. 'He can't take the boy away with him, and yet he's a good man—I'm sure he's a good man. Bennett, if you give him that rupee he'll curse you root and branch!'

They listened to each other's breathing—three—five full minutes. Then the lama raised his head, and looked forth across them into space and emptiness.

KIM

‘And I am a follower of the Way,’ he said bitterly. ‘The sin is mine and the punishment is mine. I made believe to myself—for now I see it was but make-belief—that thou wast sent to me to aid in the Search. So my heart went out to thee for thy charity and thy courtesy and the wisdom of thy little years. But those who follow the Way must permit not the fire of any desire or attachment, for that is all illusion. As says . . .’ He quoted an old, old Chinese text, backed it with another, and reinforced these with a third. ‘I stepped aside from the Way, my chela. It was no fault of thine. I delighted in the sight of life, the new people upon the roads, and in thy joy at seeing these things. I was pleased with thee who should have considered my Search and my Search alone. Now I am sorrowful because thou art taken away and my River is far from me. It is the Law which I have broken!’

‘Powers of Darkness below!’ said Father Victor, who, wise in the confessional, heard the pain in every sentence.

‘I see now that the sign of the Red Bull was a sign for me as well as for thee. All Desire is red—and evil. I will do penance and find my River alone.’

‘At least go back to the Kulu woman,’ said Kim, ‘otherwise thou wilt be lost upon the roads. She will feed thee till I run back to thee.’

The lama waved a hand to show that the matter was finally settled in his mind.

‘Now,—his tone altered as he turned to Kim,—‘what will they do with thee? At least I may, acquiring merit, wipe out past ill.’

‘Make me a Sahib—so they think. The day after to-morrow I return. Do not grieve.’

'Of what sort? Such an one as this or that man?' He pointed to Father Victor. 'Such an one as those I saw this evening—men wearing swords and stamping heavily?'

'May be.'

'That is not well. These men follow desire and come to emptiness. Thou must not be of their sort.'

'The Umballa priest said that my Star was War,' Kim interjected. 'I will ask these fools—but there is truly no need. I will run away this night, for all I wanted to see the new things.'

Kim put two or three questions in English to Father Victor, translating the replies to the lama.

Then: 'He says, "You take him from me and you cannot say what you will make him." He says, "Tell me before I go, for it is not a small thing to make a child."'

'You will be sent to a school. Later on, we shall see. Kimball, I suppose you'd like to be a soldier?'

'Gorah-log (white-folk). No-ah! No-ah!' Kim shook his head violently. There was nothing in his composition to which drill and routine appealed. 'I will not be a soldier.'

'You will be what you're told to be,' said Bennett; 'and you should be grateful that we're going to help you.'

Kim smiled compassionately. If these men lay under the delusion that he would do anything that he did not fancy, so much the better.

Another long silence followed. Bennett fidgeted with impatience, and suggested calling a sentry to evict the faquir.

'Do they give or sell learning among the Sahibs? Ask them,' said the lama, and Kim interpreted.

KIM

'They say that money is paid to the teacher—but that money the regiment will give. . . . What need? It is only for a night.'

'And—the more money is paid the better learning is given?' The lama disregarded Kim's plans for an early flight. 'It is no wrong to pay for learning; to help the ignorant to wisdom is always a merit.' The rosary clicked furiously as an abacus. Then he faced his oppressors.

'Ask them for how much money do they give a wise and suitable teaching? and in what city is that teaching given?'

'Well,' said Father Victor in English, when Kim had translated, 'that depends. The regiment would pay for you all the time you are at the Military Orphanage; or you might go on the Punjab Masonic Orphanage's list (not that he or you 'ud understand what that means); but the best schooling a boy can get in India is, of course, at St. Xavier's in Partibus at Lucknow.' This took some time to interpret, for Bennett wished to cut it short.

'He wants to know how much?' said Kim placidly.

'Two or three hundred rupees a year.' Father Victor was long past any sense of amazement. Bennett, impatient, did not understand.

'He says: "Write that name and the money upon a paper and give it him." And he says you must write your name below, because he is going to write a letter in some days to you. He says you are a good man. He says the other man is a fool. He is going away.'

The lama rose suddenly. 'I follow my Search,' he cried, and was gone.

'He'll run slap into the sentries,' cried Father Victor,

jumping up as the lama stalked out; ‘but I can’t leave the boy.’ Kim made swift motion to follow, but checked himself. There was no sound of challenge outside. The lama had disappeared.

Kim settled himself composedly on the chaplain’s cot. At least the lama had promised that he would stay with the Rajput woman from Kulu, and the rest was of the smallest importance. It pleased him that the two padres were so evidently excited. They talked long in undertones, Father Victor urging some scheme on Mr. Bennett, who seemed incredulous. All this was very new and fascinating, but Kim felt sleepy. They called men into the tent—one of them certainly was the Colonel, as his father had prophesied—and they asked him an infinity of questions, chiefly about the woman who looked after him, all of which Kim answered truthfully. They did not seem to think the woman a good guardian.

After all, this was the newest of his experiences. Sooner or later, if he chose, he could escape into great, gray, formless India, beyond tents and padres and colonels. Meantime, if the Sahibs were to be impressed, he would do his best to impress them. He too was a white man.

After much talk that he could not comprehend, they handed him over to a sergeant, who had strict instructions not to let him escape. The regiment would go on to Umballa, and Kim would be sent up, partly at the expense of the Lodge and in part by subscription, to a place called Sanawar.

‘It’s miraculous past all whooping, Colonel,’ said Father Victor, when he had talked without a break for ten minutes. ‘His Buddhist friend has levanted after taking my name and address. I can’t quite make out

KIM

whether he'll pay for the boy's education or whether he is preparing some sort of witchcraft on his own account.' Then to Kim: 'You'll live to be grateful to your friend the Red Bull yet. We'll make a man of you at Sanawar—even at the price o' making you a Protestant.'

'Certainly—most certainly,' said Bennett.

'But you will not go to Sanawar,' said Kim.

'But we will go to Sanawar, little man. That's the order of the Commander-in-Chief, who's a trifle more important than O'Hara's son.'

'You will not go to Sanawar. You will go to thee war.'

There was a shout of laughter from the full tent.

'When you know your own regiment a trifle better you won't confuse the line of march with line of battle, Kim. We hope to go to "thee war" sometime.'

'Oah, I know all thatt.' Kim drew his bow again at a venture. If they were not going to the war, at least they did not know what he knew of the talk in the veranda at Umballa.

'I know you are not at thee war now; but I tell you that as soon as you get to Umballa you will be sent to the war—the new war. It is a war of eight thousand men, besides the guns.'

'That's explicit. D'you add prophecy to your other gifts? Take him along, Sergeant. Take up a suit for him from the Drums, an' take care he doesn't slip through your fingers. Who says the age of miracles is gone by? I think I'll go to bed. My poor mind's weakening.'

At the far end of the camp, silent as a wild animal, an hour later sat Kim, newly washed all over, in a horrible stuff suit that rasped his arms and legs.

KIM

'A most amazin' young bird,' said the Sergeant. 'He turns up in charge of a yellow-headed buck-Brahmin priest, with his father's Lodge certificates round his neck, talkin' God knows what all of a red bull. The buck-Brahmin evaporates without explanations, an' the bhoy sets cross-legged on the chaplain's bed prophesyin' bloody war to the men at large. Injia's a wild land for a God-fearin' man. I'll just tie his leg to the tent-pole in case he'll go through the roof. What did ye say about the war?'

'Eight thousand men, besides guns,' said Kim. 'Very soon you will see.'

'You're a consolin' little imp. Lie down between the Drums an' go to bye-bye. Those two boys beside ye will watch your slumbers.'

CHAPTER VI

Now I remember comrades—
Old playmates on new seas—
Whenas we traded orpiment
Among the savages.
Ten thousand leagues to southward,
And thirty years removed—
They knew not noble Valdez,
But me they knew and loved.

‘Song of Diego Valdez.’

VERY early in the morning the white tents came down and disappeared as the Mavericks took a side road to Umballa. It did not skirt the resting-place, and Kim, trudging beside a baggage-cart under fire of comments from soldiers' wives, was not so confident as over-night. He discovered that he was closely watched—Father Victor on the one side, and Mr. Bennett on the other.

In the forenoon the column checked. A camel-orderly handed the Colonel a letter. He read it, and spoke to a major. Half a mile in the rear, Kim heard a hoarse and joyful clamour rolling down on him through the thick dust. Then some one beat him on the back, crying: ‘Tell us how ye knew, ye little limb of Satan? Father dear, see if ye can make him tell.’

A pony ranged alongside, and he was hauled on to the priest's saddle-bow.

'Now, my son, your prophecy of last night has come true. Our orders are to entrain at Umballa for the front to-morrow.'

'What is thatt?' said Kim, for 'front' and 'entrain' were newish words to him.

'We are going to "thee war," as you called it.'

'Of course you are going to thee war. I said last night.'

'Ye did; but, Powers o' Darkness, how did ye know?'

Kim's eyes sparkled. He shut his lips, nodded his head, and looked unspeakable things. The chaplain moved on through the dust, and privates, sergeants, and subalterns called one another's attention to the boy. The Colonel, at the head of the column, stared at him curiously. 'It was probably some bazar rumour,' he said; 'but even then—' He referred to the paper in his hand. 'Hang it all, the thing was only decided within the last forty-eight hours.'

'Are there many more like you in India?' said Father Victor, 'or are you by way o' being a *lusus naturæ*?'

'Now I have told you,' said the boy, 'will you let me go back to my old man? If he has not stayed with that woman from Kulu, I am afraid he will die.'

'By what I saw of him he's as well able to take care of himself as you. No. Ye've brought us luck, an' we're goin' to make a man of you. I'll take ye back to your baggage-cart and ye'll come to me this evening.'

For the rest of the day Kim found himself an object of distinguished consideration among a few hundred white men. The story of his appearance in camp, the discovery of his parentage, and his prophecy, had lost nothing in the telling. A big, shapeless white woman

KIM

on a pile of bedding asked him mysteriously whether he thought her husband would come back from the war. Kim reflected gravely, and said that he would, and the woman gave him food. In many respects, this big procession that played music at intervals—this crowd that talked and laughed so easily—resembled a festival in Lahore city. So far, there was no sign of hard work, and he resolved to lend the spectacle his patronage. At evening there came out to meet them bands of music, and played the Mavericks into camp near Umballa railway station. That was an interesting night. Men of other regiments came to visit the Mavericks. The Mavericks went visiting on their own account. Their pickets hurried forth to bring them back, met pickets of strange regiments on the same duty; and, after a while, the bugles blew madly for more pickets with officers to control the tumult. The Mavericks had a reputation for liveliness to live up to. But they fell in on the platform next morning in perfect shape and condition; and Kim, left behind with the sick, women, and boys, found himself shouting farewells excitedly as the trains drew away. Life as a Sahib was amusing so far; but he touched it with a cautious hand. Then they marched him back in charge of a drummer-boy to empty, lime-washed barracks, whose floors were covered with rubbish and string and paper, and whose ceilings gave back his lonely footfall. Native fashion, he curled himself up on a stripped cot and went to sleep. An angry man stumped down the veranda, woke him up, and said he was a schoolmaster. This was enough for Kim, and he retired into his shell. He could just puzzle out the various English Police notices in Lahore city, because they affected his comfort; and among the many guests

KIM

of the woman who looked after him had been a queer German who painted scenery for the Parsee travelling theatre. He told Kim that he had been ‘on the barricades in Forty-eight,’ and therefore—at least that was how it struck Kim—he would teach the boy to write in return for food. Kim had been kicked as far as single letters, but did not think well of them.

‘I do not know anything. Go away!’ said Kim, scenting evil. Hereupon the man caught him by the ear, dragged him to a room in a far-off wing where a dozen drummer-boys were sitting on forms, and told him to be still if he could do nothing else. This he managed very successfully. The man explained something or other with white lines on a black board for at least half an hour, and Kim continued his interrupted nap. He much disapproved of the present aspect of affairs, for this was the very school and discipline he had spent two-thirds of his young life in avoiding. Suddenly a beautiful idea occurred to him, and he wondered that he had not thought of it before.

The man dismissed them, and first to spring through the veranda into the open sunshine was Kim.

‘Ere you! Alt! Stop!’ said a high voice at his heels. ‘I’ve got to look after you. My orders are not to let you out of my sight. Where are you goin’?’

It was the drummer-boy who had been hanging round him all the forenoon—a fat and freckled person of about fourteen, and Kim loathed him from the soles of his boots to his cap-ribbons.

‘To the bazar—to get sweets—for you,’ said Kim, after thought.

‘Well, the bazar’s out o’ bounds. If we go there we’ll get a dressing-down. You come back.’

KIM

'How near can we go?' Kim did not know what bounds meant, but he wished to be polite—for the present.

'Ow near? 'Ow far, you mean? We can go as far as that tree down the road.'

'Then I will go there.'

'All right. I ain't goin'. It's too 'ot. I can watch you from 'ere. It's no good runnin' away. If you did, they'd spot you by your clothes. That's regimental stuff you're wearin'. There ain't a picket in Umballa wouldn't 'ead you back quicker than you started out.'

This did not impress Kim as much as the knowledge that his raiment would tire him out if he tried to run. He slouched to the tree at the corner of a bare road leading towards the bazar, and eyed the natives passing. Most of them were barrack-servants of the lowest caste. Kim hailed a sweeper, who promptly retorted with a piece of unnecessary insolence, in the natural belief that the European boy could not follow. The low, quick answer undeceived him. Kim put his fettered soul into it, thankful for the late chance to abuse somebody in the tongue he knew best. 'And now, go to the nearest letter-writer in the bazar and tell him to come here. I would write a letter.'

'But—but what manner of white man's son art thou, to need a bazar letter-writer? Is there not a schoolmaster in the barracks?'

'Ay; and Hell is full of the same sort. Do my order, you—you Od! Thy mother was married under a basket! Servant of Lal Beg' (Kim knew the god of the sweepers), 'run on my business or we will talk again.'

The sweeper shuffled off in haste. 'There is a white boy by the barracks waiting under a tree who is not a

KIM

'white boy,' he stammered to the first bazar letter-writer he came across. 'He needs thee.'

'Will he pay?' said that spruce scribe, gathering up his desk and pens and sealing-wax all in order.

'I do not know. He is not like other boys. Go and see. It is well worth.'

Kim danced with impatience when the slim young Kayeth hove in sight. As soon as his voice could carry he cursed him volubly.

'First I will take my pay,' the letter-writer said. 'Bad words have made the price higher. But who art thou, dressed in that fashion, to speak in this fashion?'

'Aha! That is in the letter which thou shalt write. Never was such a tale. But I am in no haste. Another writer will serve me. Umballa city is as full of them as is Lahore.'

'Four annas,' said the writer, sitting down and spreading his cloth in the shade of a deserted barrack-wing.

Mechanically Kim squatted beside him,—squatted as only the natives can,—in spite of the abominable clinging trousers.

The writer regarded him sideways.

'That is the price to ask of Sahibs,' said Kim. 'Now fix me a true one.'

'An anna and a half. How do I know, having written the letter, that thou wilt not run away?'

'I must not go beyond this tree, and there is also the stamp to be considered.'

'I get no commission on the price of the stamp. Once more, what manner of white boy art thou?'

'That shall be said in the letter, which is to Mahbub Ali, the horse-dealer in the Kashmir Serai, at Lahore. He is my friend.'

KIM

‘Wonder on wonder!’ murmured the letter-writer, dipping a reed in the inkstand. ‘To be written in Hindi?’

‘Assuredly. To Mahbub Ali then. Begin! “I have come down with the old man as far as Umballa in the train. At Umballa I carried the news of the bay mare’s pedigree.”’ After what he had seen in the garden, he was not going to write of white stallions.

‘Slower a little. What has a bay mare to do. . . . Is it Mahbub Ali the great dealer?’

‘Who else? I have been in his service. Take more ink. Again. “As the order was, so I did it. We then went on foot towards Benares, but on the third day we found a certain regiment.”’ Is that down?’

‘Ay, “pulton,”’ murmured the writer, all ears.

“I went into their camp and was caught, and by means of the charm about my neck, which thou knowest, it was established that I was the son of some man in the regiment: according to the prophecy of the Red Bull, which thou knowest was common talk of our bazar.”’ Kim waited for this shaft to sink into the letter-writer’s heart, cleared his throat, and continued: “A priest clothed me and gave me a new name. . . . One priest, however, was a fool. The clothes are very heavy, but I am a Sahib and my heart is heavy too. They send me to a school and beat me. I do not like the air and water here. Come then and help me, Mahbub Ali, or send me some money, for I have not sufficient to pay the writer who writes this.”’

“Who writes this.” It is my own fault that I was tricked. Thou art as clever as Husain Bux that forged the Treasury stamps at Nucklao. But what a tale! What a tale! Is it true by any chance?”

KIM

'It does not profit to tell lies to Mahbub Ali. It is better to help his friends by lending them a stamp. When the money comes I will repay.'

The writer grunted doubtfully, but took a stamp out of his desk, sealed the letter, handed it over to Kim, and departed. Mahbub Ali's was a name of power in Umballa.

'That is the way to win a good account with the Gods,' Kim shouted after him.

'Pay me twice over when the money comes,' the man cried over his shoulder.

'What was you bukkin' to that nigger about?' said the drummer-boy when Kim returned to the veranda. 'I was watchin' you.'

'I was only talkin' to him.'

'You talk the same as a nigger, don't you?'

'No-ah! No-ah! I onlee speak a little. What shall we do now?'

'The bugles 'ill go for dinner in arf a minute. My Gawd! I wish I'd gone up to the front with the regiment. It's awful doin' nothin' but school down 'ere. Don't you 'ate it?'

'Oah yess!'

'I'd run away if I knew where to go to, but, as the men say, in this bloomin' Injia you're only a prisoner at large. You can't desert without bein' took back at once. I'm fair sick of it.'

'You have been in Be—England?'

'W'y, I only come out last troopin' season with my mother. I should think I 'ave been in England. What a ignorant little beggar you are. You was brought up in the gutter, wasn't you?'

'Oah yess. Tell me something about England. My father he came from there.'

KIM

Though he would not say so, Kim of course disbelieved every word the drummer-boy spoke about the Liverpool suburb which was his England. It passed the heavy time till dinner—a most unappetising meal served to the boys and a few invalids in a corner of a barrack-room. But that he had written to Mahbub Ali, Kim would have been almost depressed. The indifference of native crowds he was used to; but this strong loneliness among white men preyed on him. He was grateful when, in the course of the afternoon, a big soldier took him over to Father Victor, who lived in another wing across another dusty parade-ground. The priest was reading an English letter written in purple ink. He looked at Kim more curiously than ever.

‘An’ how do you like it, my son, as far as you’ve gone? Not much, eh? It must be hard—very hard on a wild animal. Listen now. I’ve an amazin’ epistle from your friend.’

‘Where is he? Is he well? Oah! If he knows to write me letters, it is all right.’

‘You’re fond of him then?’

‘Of course I am fond of him. He was fond of me.’

‘It seems so by the look of this. He can’t write English, can he?’

‘Oah no. Not that I know, but of course he found a letter-writer who can write English verree well, and so he wrote. I do hope you understand.’

‘That accounts for it. D’you know anything about his money affairs?’ Kim’s face showed that he did not.

‘How can I tell?’

‘That’s what I’m askin’. Now listen if you can make head or tail o’ this. We’ll skip the first part. . . .

It's written from Jagadhir Road. . . . “Sitting on wayside in grave meditation, trusting to be favoured with your Honour's applause of present step, which recommend your Honour to execute for Almighty God's sake. Education is greatest blessing if of best sorts. Otherwise no earthly use.” Faith, the old man's hit the bull's-eye that time! “If your Honour condescending giving my boy best educations Xavier” (I suppose that's St. Xavier in Partibus) “in terms of our conversation dated in your tent 15th instant” (a business-like touch there!) “then Almighty God blessing your Honour's succeedings to third an' fourth generation and”—now listen!—“confide in your Honour's humble servant for adequat remuneration per hoondie per annum three hundred rupees a year to one expensive education St. Xavier, Lucknow, and allow small time to forward same per hoondie sent to any part of India as your Honour shall address yourself. This servant of your Honour has presently no place to lay crown of his head, but going to Benares by train on account of persecution of old woman talking so much and unanxious residing Saharunpore in any domestic capacity.” Now what in the world does that mean?”

‘She has asked him to be puro—her clergyman—at Saharunpore, I think. He would not do that on account of his River. She did talk.’

‘It's clear to you, is it? It beats me altogether. “So going to Benares, where will find address and forward rupees for boy who is apple of eye, and for Almighty God's sake execute this education, and your petitioner as in duty bound shall ever awfully pray. Written by Sobrao Satai, Failed Entrance Allahabad University, for Venerable Teshoo Lama the priest of Suchzen look-

KIM

ing for a River, address care of Tirthankers' Temple, Benares. P. M.—Please note boy is apple of eye, and rupees shall be sent per hoondie three hundred per annum. For God Almighty's sake." Now, is that ravin' lunacy or a business proposition? I ask you, because I'm fairly at my wits' end.'

'He says he will give me three hundred rupees a year, so he will give me them.'

'Oh, that's the way you look at it, is it?'

'Of course. If he says so!'

The priest whistled; then he addressed Kim as an equal.

'I don't believe it; but we'll see. You were goin' off to-day to the Military Orphanage at Sanawar, where the regiment would keep you till you were old enough to enlist. Ye'd be brought up to the Church of England. Bennett arranged for that. On the other hand, if ye go to St. Xavier's ye'll get a better education an'—an' can have the religion. D'ye see my dilemma?'

Kim saw nothing save a vision of the lama going south in a train with none to beg for him.

'Like most people, I'm going to temporise. If your friend sends the money from Benares—Powers of Darkness below, where's a street-beggar to raise three hundred rupees?—ye'll go down to Lucknow and I'll pay your fare, because I can't touch the subscription-money if I intend, as I do, to make ye a Catholic. If he doesn't, ye'll go to the Military Orphanage at the regiment's expense. I'll allow him three days' grace, though I don't believe it at all. Even then, if he fails in his payments later on . . . but it's beyond me. We can only walk one step at a time in this world, praise God! An' they sent Bennett to the front an' left me behind. Bennett can't expect everything.'

'Oah yess,' said Kim vaguely.

The priest leaned forward. 'I'd give a month's pay to find what's goin' on inside that little round head of yours.'

'There is nothing,' said Kim, and scratched it. He was wondering whether Mahbub Ali would send him as much as a whole rupee. Then he could pay the letter-writer and write letters to the lama at Benares. Perhaps Mahbub Ali would visit him next time he came south with horses. Surely he must know that Kim's delivery of the letter to the officer at Umballa had caused the great war which the men and boys had discussed so loudly over the barrack dinner-tables. But if Mahbub Ali did not know this, it would be very unsafe to tell him so. Mahbub Ali was hard upon boys who knew, or thought they knew, too much.

'Well, till I get further news'—Father Victor's voice interrupted the reverie—'ye can run along and play with the other boys. They'll teach ye something—but I don't think ye'll like it.'

The day dragged to its weary end. When he wished to sleep he was instructed how to fold up his clothes and set out his boots; the other boys deriding. Bugles waked him in the dawn; the schoolmaster caught him after breakfast, thrust a page of meaningless characters under his nose, gave them senseless names, and whacked him without reason. Kim meditated poisoning him with opium borrowed from a barrack-sweeper, but reflected that, as they all ate at one table in public (this was peculiarly revolting to Kim, who preferred to turn his back on the world at his meals), the stroke might be dangerous. Then he attempted running off to the village where the priest had tried to drug the lama—the

KIM

village where the old soldier lived. But far-seeing sentries at every exit headed back the little scarlet figure. Trousers and jacket crippled body and mind alike, so he abandoned the project and fell back, Oriental fashion, on time and chance. Three days of torment passed in the big, echoing white rooms. He walked out of afternoons under escort of the drummer-boy, and all he heard from his companion were the few useless words which seemed to make two-thirds of the white man's abuse. Kim knew and despised them all long ago. The boy resented his silence and lack of interest by beating him, as was only natural. He did not care for any of the bazars which were in bounds. He styled all natives 'niggers'; yet servants and sweepers called him abominable names to his face, and, misled by their deferential attitude, he never understood. This somewhat consoled Kim for the beatings.

On the morning of the fourth day a judgment overtook that drummer. They had gone out together towards Umballa race-course. He returned alone, weeping, with news that young O'Hara, to whom he had been doing nothing in particular, had hailed a scarlet-bearded nigger on horseback; that the nigger had then and there laid into him with a peculiarly adhesive quirt, picked up young O'Hara, and borne him off at full gallop. These tidings came to Father Victor, and he drew down his long upper lip. He was already sufficiently startled by a letter from the Temple of the Tirthankers at Benares, enclosing a native banker's note of hand for three hundred rupees, and an amazing prayer to 'Almighty God.' The lama would have been more annoyed than the priest had he known how the bazar letter-writer had translated his phrase 'to acquire merit.'

'Powers of Darkness below!' Father Victor fumbled with the note. 'An' now he's off with another of his peep-o'-day friends. I don't know whether it will be a greater relief to me to get him back or to have him lost. He's beyond my comprehension. How the Devil—yes, He's the man I mean—can a street-beggar raise money to educate white boys?'

Three miles off, on Umballa race-course, Mahbud Ali, reining a gray Cabuli stallion with Kim in front of him, was saying:

'But, Little Friend of all the World, there is my honour and reputation to be considered. All the officer-sahibs in all the regiments, and all Umballa, know Mahbub Ali. Men saw me pick thee up and chastise that boy. We are seen now from far across this plain. How can I take thee away, or account for thy disappearing if I set thee down and let thee run off into the crops? They would put me in jail. Be patient. Once a Sahib, always a Sahib. When thou art a man—who knows—thou wilt be grateful to Mahbub Ali.'

'Take me beyond their sentries where I can change this red. Give me money and I will go to Benares and be with my lama again. I do not want to be a Sahib, and remember I did deliver that message.'

The stallion bounded wildly. Mahbub Ali had inadvertently driven home the sharp-edged stirrup. (He was not the new sort of fluent horse-dealer who wears English boots and spurs.) Kim drew his own conclusions from that betrayal.

'That was a small matter. It lay on the straight road to Benares. I and the Sahib have by this time forgotten it. I send so many letters and messages to men who ask questions about horses, I cannot well remember one

KIM

from the other. Was it some matter of a bay mare that Peters Sahib wished the pedigree of?’

Kim saw the trap at once. If he had said ‘bay mare’ Mahbub would have known by his very readiness to fall in with the amendment that the boy suspected something. Kim replied therefore:

‘Bay mare? No. I do not forget my messages thus. It was a white stallion.’

‘Ay, so it was. A white Arab stallion. But thou didst write bay mare to me.’

‘Who cares to tell truth to a letter-writer?’ Kim answered, feeling Mahbub’s palm on his heart.

‘Hi! Mahbub, you old villain, pull up!’ cried a voice, and an Englishman raced alongside on a little polo-pony. ‘I’ve been chasing you half over the country. That Cabuli of yours can go. For sale, I suppose?’

‘I have some young stuff coming on made by Heaven for the delicate and difficult polo-game. He has no equal. He—’

‘Plays polo and waits at table. Yes. We know all that. What the deuce have you got there?’

‘A boy,’ said Mahbub gravely. ‘He was being beaten by another boy. His father was once a white soldier in the big war. The boy was a child in Lahore city. He played with my horses when he was a babe. Now I think they will make him a soldier. He has been newly caught by his father’s regiment that went up to the war last week. But I do not think he wants to be a soldier. I take him for a ride. Tell me where thy barracks are and I will set thee there.’

‘Let me go. I can find the barracks alone.’

‘And if thou runnest away who will say it is not my fault?’

KIM

'He'll run back to his dinner. Where has he to run to?' the Englishman asked.

'He was born in the land. He has friends. He goes where he chooses. He is a chabuk sawai (a sharp chap). It needs only to change his clothing, and in a twinkling he would be a low-caste Hindi boy.'

'The deuce he would!' The Englishman looked critically at the boy as Mahbub headed towards the barracks. Kim ground his teeth. Mahbub was mocking him, as faithless Afghans will; for he went on:

'They will send him to a school and put heavy boots on his feet and swaddle him in these clothes. Then he will forget all he knows. Now which of the barracks is thine?'

Kim pointed—he could not speak—to Father Victor's wing, all staring white near by.

'Perhaps he will make a good soldier,' said Mahbub reflectively. 'He will make a good orderly at least. I sent him to deliver a message once from Lahore. A message concerning the pedigree of a white stallion.'

Here was deadly insult on deadlier injury—and the Sahib to whom he had so craftily given that war-making letter heard it all. Kim beheld Mahbub Ali frying in flame for his treachery, but for himself he saw one long gray vista of barracks, schools, and barracks again. He gazed imploringly at the clear-cut face in which there was no glimmer of recognition; but even at this extremity it never occurred to him to throw himself on the white man's mercy or to denounce the Afghan. And Mahbub stared deliberately at the Englishman, who stared as deliberately at Kim, quivering and tongue-tied.

'My horse is well trained,' said the dealer. 'Others would have kicked, Sahib.'

'Ah,' said the Englishman at last, rubbing his pony's

KIM

damp withers with his whip-butt. ‘Who makes the boy a soldier?’

‘He says the regiment that found him, and especially the padre-sahib of that regiment.’

‘There is the padre!’ Kim choked as bare-headed Father Victor sailed down upon them from the veranda.

‘Powers o’ Darkness below, O’Hara! How many more mixed friends do you keep in Asia?’ he cried, as Kim slid down and stood helplessly before him.

‘Good morning, Padre,’ the Colonel said cheerily. ‘I know you by reputation well enough. Meant to have come over and called before this. I’m Creighton.’

‘Of the Ethnological Survey?’ said Father Victor. The Colonel nodded. ‘Faith I’m glad to meet ye then; an’ I owe you some thanks for bringing back the boy.’

‘No thanks to me, Padre. Besides, the boy wasn’t going away. You don’t know old Mahbub Ali’—the horse-dealer sat impassive in the sunlight. ‘You will when you have been in the station a month. He sells us all our crocks. That boy is rather a curiosity. Can you tell me anything about him?’

‘Can I tell you?’ puffed Father Victor. ‘You’ll be the one man that could help me in my quandaries. Tell you! Powers o’ Darkness, I’m bursting to tell some one who knows something o’ the native!’

A groom came round the corner. Colonel Creighton raised his voice, speaking in Urdu. ‘Very good, Mahbub Ali, but what is the use of telling me all those stories about the pony. Not one pie more than three hundred and fifty rupees will I give.’

‘The Sahib is a little hot and angry after riding,’ the horse-dealer returned, with the leer of a privileged jester. ‘Presently, he will see my horse’s points more clearly.

I will wait till he has finished his talk with the padre. I will wait under that tree.'

'Confound you!' The Colonel laughed. 'That comes of looking at one of Mahbub's horses. He's a regular old leech, Padre. Wait then, if thou hast so much time to spare, Mahbub. Now I'm at your service, Padre. Where is the boy? Oh, he's gone off to colleague with Mahbub. Queer sort of boy. Might I ask you to send my mare round under cover?'

He dropped into a chair which commanded a clear view of Kim and Mahbub Ali in conference beneath the tree. The padre went indoors for cheroots.

Creighton heard Kim say bitterly: 'Trust a Brahmin before a snake, and a snake before a harlot, and a harlot before an Afghan, Mahbub Ali.'

'That is all one,' the great red beard wagged solemnly. 'Children should not see a carpet on the loom till the pattern is made plain. Believe me, Friend of all the World, I do thee great service. They will not make a soldier of thee.'

'You crafty old sinner,' thought Creighton. 'But you're not far wrong. That boy mustn't be wasted if he is as advertised.'

'Excuse me half a minute,' cried the padre from within, 'but I'm gettin' the documents of the case.'

'If through me the favour of this bold and wise Colonel Sahib comes to thee, and thou art raised to honour, what thanks wilt thou give Mahbub Ali when thou art a man?'

'Nay, nay; I begged thee to let me take the road again, where I should have been safe; and thou hast sold me back to the English. What will they give thee for blood-money?'

KIM

‘A cheerful young demon!’ The Colonel bit his cigar, and turned politely to Father Victor.

‘What are the letters that the fat priest is waving before the Colonel? Stand behind the stallion as though looking at my bridle!’ said Mahbub Ali.

‘A letter from my lama which he wrote from Jagadhir Road, saying that he will pay three hundred rupees by the year for my schooling.’

‘Oho! Is old Red Hat of that sort? At which school?’

‘God knows. I think in Nucklao.’

‘Yes. There is a big school there for the sons of Sahibs—and half-Sahibs. I have seen it when I sell horses there. So the lama also loved the Friend of all the World?’

‘Ay; and he did not tell lies, or return me to captivity.’

‘Small wonder the padre does not know how to unravel the thread. How fast he talks to the Colonel Sahib.’ Mahbub Ali chuckled. ‘By Allah!—the keen eyes swept the veranda for an instant—thy lama has sent what to me looks like a note of hand. I have had some small dealings in hoondies. The Colonel Sahib is looking at it.’

‘What good is all this to me?’ said Kim wearily. ‘Thou wilt go away, and they will return me to those empty rooms where there is no good place to sleep and where the boys beat me.’

‘I do not think that. Have patience, child. All Pathans are not faithless—except in horseflesh.’

Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed, Father Victor talking energetically or asking questions which the Colonel answered.

‘Now I’ve told you everything that I know about the

boy from beginnin' to end; and it's a blessed relief to me. Did ye ever hear the like?'

'At any rate, the old man has sent the money. Go-bind Sahai's notes of hand are good from here to China,' said the Colonel. 'The more one knows about natives the less can one say what they will or won't do.'

'That's consolin'—from the head of the Ethnological Survey. It's this mixture of Red Bulls and Rivers of Healing (poor heathen, God help him!) an' notes of hand and Masonic certificates. Are you a Mason, by any chance?'

'By Jove, I am, now I come to think of it. That's an additional reason,' said the Colonel absently.

'I'm glad ye see a reason in it. But as I said, it's the mixture o' things that's beyond me. An' his prophesyin' to our Colonelsitting on my bed with his little shimmy torn open showing his white skin; an' the prophecy comin' true! They'll cure all that nonsense at St. Xavier's, eh?'

'Sprinkle him with holy water,' the Colonel laughed.

'On my word, I fancy I ought to sometimes. But I'm hoping he'll be brought up as a good Catholic. All that troubles me is what'll happen if the old beggar-man—'

'Lama, lama, my dear sir; and some of them are gentlemen in their own country.'

'The lama, then, fails to pay next year. He's a fine business head to plan on the spur of the moment, but he's bound to die some day. An' takin' a heathen's money to give a child a Christian education—'

'But he said explicitly what he wanted. As soon as he knew the boy was white he seems to have made his arrangements accordingly. I'd give a month's pay to

KIM

hear how he explained it all at the Tirthankers' Temple at Benares. Look here, Padre, I don't pretend to know much about natives, but if he says he'll pay, he'll pay—dead or alive. I mean his heirs will assume the debt. My advice to you is, send the boy down to Lucknow. If your Anglican chaplain thinks you've stolen a march on him—'

'Bad luck to Bennett! He was sent to the front instead o' me. Doughty certified me medically unfit. I'll excommunicate Doughty if he comes back alive! Surely Bennett ought to be content with—'

'Glory, leaving you the religion. Quite so! As a matter of fact I don't think Bennett will mind. Put the blame on me. I—er—strongly recommend sending the boy to St. Xavier's. He can go down on pass as a soldier's orphan, so the railway fare will be saved. You can buy him an outfit from the regimental subscription. The Lodge will be saved the expense of his education, and that will put the Lodge in a good temper. It's perfectly easy. I've got to go down to Lucknow next week. I'll look after the boy on the way—give him in charge of my servants, and so on.'

'You're a good man.'

'Not in the least. Don't make that mistake. The lama has sent us money for a definite end. We can't very well return it. We shall have to do as he says. Well, that's settled, isn't it? Shall we say that, Tuesday next, you'll hand him over to me at the night train south? That's only three days. He can't do much harm in three days.'

'It's a weight off my mind, but—this thing here?'—he waved the note of hand—'I don't know Gobind Sahai: or his bank, which may be a hole in a wall.'

KIM

‘You’ve never been a subaltern in debt. I’ll cash it if you like, and send you the vouchers in proper order.’

‘But with all your own work too! It’s askin’—’

‘It’s not the least trouble indeed. You see, as an ethnologist, the thing’s very interesting to me. I’d like to make a note of it for some Government work that I’m doing. The transformation of a regimental badge like your Red Bull into a sort of fetish that the boy follows is very interesting.’

‘But I can’t thank you enough.’

‘There’s one thing you can do. All we Ethnological men are as jealous as jackdaws of one another’s discoveries. They’re of no interest to any one but ourselves, of course, but you know what book-collectors are like. Well, don’t say a word, directly or indirectly, about the Asiatic side of the boy’s character—his adventures and his prophecy, and so on. I’ll worm them out of the boy later on and—you see?’

‘I do. Ye’ll make a wonderful account of it. Never a word will I say to any one till I see it in print.’

‘Thank you. That goes straight to an ethnologist’s heart. Well, I must be getting back to my breakfast. Good heavens! Old Mahbub here still?’ He raised his voice, and the horse-dealer came out from under the shadow of the tree. ‘Well, what is it?’

‘As regards that young horse,’ said Mahbub, ‘I say that when a colt is born to be a polo-pony, closely following the ball without teaching—when such a colt knows the game by divination—then I say it is a great wrong to break that colt to a heavy cart, Sahib!’

‘So do I say also, Mahbub. The colt will be entered for polo only. (These fellows think of nothing in the

KIM

world but horses, Padre.) I'll see you to-morrow, Mahbub, if you've anything likely for sale.'

The dealer saluted, horseman fashion, with a sweep of the off hand. 'Be patient a little, Friend of all the World,' he whispered to the agonised Kim. 'Thy fortune is made. In a little while thou goest to Nucklao, and—here is something to pay the letter-writer. I shall see thee again, I think, many times,' and he cantered off down the road.

'Listen to me,' said the Colonel from the veranda, speaking in the vernacular. 'In three days thou wilt go with me to Lucknow, seeing and hearing new things all the while. Therefore sit still for three days and do not run away. Thou wilt go to school at Lucknow.'

'Shall I meet my Holy One there?' Kim whimpered.

'At least Lucknow is nearer to Benares than Umballa. It may be thou wilt go under my protection. Mahbub Ali knows this, and he will be angry if thou returnest to the road now. Remember—much has been told to me which I do not forget.'

'I will wait,' said Kim, 'but the boys will beat me.'

Then the bugles blew for dinner.

CHAPTER VII

Unto whose use the pregnant suns are poised
With idiot moons and stars retracting stars?
Creep thou betweene—thy coming's all unnoised.
Heaven hath her high, as earth her baser, wars.
Heir to these tumults, this affright, that fray
(By Adam's, fathers', own, sin bound alway);
Peer up, draw out thy horoscope and say
Which planet mends thy threadbare fate or mars!

Sir John Christie.

IN the afternoon the red-faced schoolmaster told Kim that he had been ‘struck off the strength,’ which conveyed no meaning to him till he was ordered to go away and play. Then he ran to the bazar, and found the young letter-writer to whom he owed a stamp.

‘Now I pay,’ said Kim royally, ‘and now I need another letter to be written.’

‘Mahbub Ali is in Umballa,’ said the writer jauntily. He was, by virtue of his office, a bureau of general misinformation.

‘This is not to Mahbub, but to a priest. Take thy pen and write quickly. “To Teshoo Lama, the holy one from Bhotiyal seeking for a River, who is now in the Temple of the Tirthankers at Benares.” Take more ink! “In three days I am to go down to Nucklao to the school at Nucklao. The name of the school is Xavier.

KIM

I do not know where that school is, but it is at Nucklao."

'But I know Nucklao,' the writer interrupted. 'I know the school.'

'Tell him where it is, and I give half an anna.'

The reed pen scratched busily. 'He cannot mistake.' The man lifted his head. 'Who watches us across the street?'

Kim looked up hurriedly and saw Colonel Creighton in tennis-flannels.

'Oh, that is some Sahib who knows the fat priest in the barracks. He is beckoning me.'

'What dost thou?' said the Colonel, when Kim trotted up.

'I—I am not running away. I send a letter to my Holy One at Benares.'

'I had not thought of that. Hast thou said that I take thee to Lucknow?'

'Nay, I have not. Read the letter, if there be a doubt.'

'Then why hast thou left out my name in writing to that Holy One?' The Colonel smiled a queer smile. Kim took his courage in both hands.

'It was said once to me that it is inexpedient to write the names of strangers concerned in any matter, because by the naming of names many good plans are brought to confusion.'

'Thou hast been well taught,' the Colonel replied, and Kim flushed. 'I have left my cheroot-case in the padre's veranda. Bring it to my house this even.'

'Where is the house?' said Kim. His quick wit told him that he was being tested in some fashion or another, and he stood on guard.

KIM

‘Ask any one in the big bazar.’ The Colonel walked on.

‘He has forgotten his cheroot-case,’ said Kim, returning. ‘I must bring it to him this evening. That is all my letter except, thrice over, “Come to me! Come to me! Come to me!” Now I will pay for a stamp and put it in the post.’ He rose to go, and as an after-thought asked, ‘Who is that angry-faced Sahib who lost the cheroot-case?’

‘Oh, he is only Creighton Sahib—a very foolish Sahib, who is a Colonel Sahib without a regiment.’

‘What is his business?’

‘God knows. He is always buying horses which he cannot ride, and asking riddles about the works of God—such as plants and stones and the customs of people. The dealers call him the father of fools, because he is so easily cheated about a horse. Mahbub Ali says he is madder than all other Sahibs.’

‘Oh!’ said Kim, and departed. His training had given him some small knowledge of character, and he argued that fools are not given information which leads to calling out eight thousand men, besides guns. The Commander-in-Chief of all India does not talk, as Kim had heard him talk, to fools. Nor would Mahbub Ali’s tone have changed, as it did every time he mentioned the Colonel’s name, if the Colonel had been a fool. Consequently—and this set Kim to skipping—there was a mystery somewhere, and Mahbub Ali probably spied for the Colonel much as Kim had spied for Mahbub. And, like the horse-dealer, the Colonel evidently respected people who did not show themselves to be too clever.

He rejoiced that he had not betrayed his knowledge

of the Colonel's house; and when, on his return to barracks, he discovered that no cheroot-case had been left behind, he beamed with delight. Here was a man after his own heart—a tortuous and indirect person playing a hidden game. Well, if he could be a fool, so could Kim.

He showed nothing of his mind when Father Victor, for three long mornings, discoursed to him of an entirely new set of gods and godlings—notably of a goddess called Mary, who, he gathered, was one with Bibi Miriam of Mahbub Ali's theology. He betrayed no emotion when, after the lecture, Father Victor dragged him from shop to shop buying articles of outfit, nor when envious drummer-boys kicked him because he was going to a superior school did he complain, but awaited the play of circumstances with an interested soul. Father Victor, good man, took him to the station, put him into an empty second-class next to Colonel Creighton's first, and bade him farewell with genuine feeling.

'They'll make a man o' you, O'Hara, at St. Xavier's—a white man, an', I hope, a good man. They know all about your comin', an' the Colonel will see that ye're not lost or mislaid anywhere on the road. I've given you a notion of religious matters,—at least I hope so,—and you'll remember, when they ask you your religion, that you're a Cath'lic. Better say Roman Cath'lic, tho' I'm not fond of the word.'

Kim lit a rank cigarette—he had been careful to buy a stock in the bazar—and lay down to think. This solitary passage was very different from that joyful down-journey in the third-class with the lama. 'Sahibs get little pleasure of travel,' he reflected. 'Hai mai! I go from one place to another as it might be a kick-ball.'

KIM

It is my kismet. No man can escape his kismet. But I am to pray to Bibi Miriam and I am a Sahib'—he looked at his boots ruefully. ‘No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?’ He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam. He was one insignificant person in all this roaring whirl of India, going southward to he knew not what fate.

Presently the Colonel sent for him, and talked for a long time. So far as Kim could gather, he was to be diligent and enter the Survey of India as a chain-man. If he were very good, and passed the proper examinations, he would be earning thirty rupees a month at seventeen years old, and Colonel Creighton would see that he found a suitable employment.

Kim pretended at first to understand perhaps one word in three of this talk. Then the Colonel, seeing his mistake, turned to fluent and picturesque Urdu and Kim was contented. No man could be a fool who knew the language so intimately, who moved so gently and silently, and whose eyes were so different from the dull fat eyes of other Sahibs.

‘Yes, and thou must learn how to make pictures of roads and mountains and rivers—to carry these pictures in thy eye till a suitable time comes to set them upon paper. Perhaps some day, when thou art a chain-man, I may say to thee when we are working together: “Go across those hills and see what lies beyond.”’ Then one will say: “There are bad people living in those hills who will slay the chain-man if he be seen to look like a Sahib.” What then?’

Kim thought. Would it be safe to return the Colonel's lead?

KIM

‘I would tell what that other man had said.’

‘But if I answered: “I will give thee a hundred rupees for knowledge of what is behind those hills—for a picture of a river and a little news of what the people say in the villages there”?’

‘How can I tell? I am only a boy. Wait till I am a man.’ Then, seeing the Colonel’s brow clouded, he went on: ‘But I think I should in a few days earn the hundred rupees.’

‘By what road?’

Kim shook his head resolutely. ‘If I said how I would earn them, another man might hear and forestall me. It is no good to sell knowledge for nothing.’

‘Tell now.’ The Colonel held up a rupee. Kim’s hand half reached towards it, and dropped.

‘Nay, Sahib; nay. I know the price that will be paid for the answer, but I do not know why the question is asked.’

‘Take it for a gift, then,’ said Creighton, tossing it over. ‘There is a good spirit in thee. Do not let it be blunted at St. Xavier’s. There are many boys there who despise the black men.’

‘Their mothers were bazar-women,’ said Kim. He knew well there is no hatred like that of the half-caste for his brother-in-law.

‘True; but thou art a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to contemn the black men. I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or the customs of black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. There is no sin so great as ignorance. Remember this.’

Several times in the course of the long twenty-four

KIM

hours' run south did the Colonel send for Kim, always developing this latter text.

'We be all on one lead-rope, then,' said Kim at last, 'the Colonel, Mahbub Ali, and I—when I become a chain-man. He will use me as Mahbub Ali employed me, I think. That is good, if it allows me to return to the road again. This clothing grows no easier by wear.'

When they came to the crowded Lucknow station there was no sign of the lama. He swallowed his disappointment, while the Colonel bundled him into a ticca-garri with his neat belongings and despatched him alone to St. Xavier's.

'I do not say farewell, because we shall meet again,' he cried. 'Again, and many times, if thou art one of good spirit. But thou art not yet tried.'

'Not when I brought thee'—Kim actually dared to use the tum of equals—'a white stallion's pedigree that night?'

'Much is gained by forgetting, little brother,' said the Colonel, with a look that pierced through Kim's shoulder-blades as he scuttled into the carriage.

It took him nearly five minutes to recover. Then he sniffed the new air appreciatively. 'A rich city,' he said. 'Richer than Lahore. How good the bazars must be! Coachman, drive me a little through the bazars here.'

'My order is to take thee to the school.' The driver used the 'thou,' which is rudeness when applied to a white man. In the clearest and most fluent vernacular Kim pointed out his error, climbed on to the box-seat, and, perfect understanding established, drove for a couple of hours up and down, estimating, comparing, and enjoying. There is no city—except Bombay, the

KIM

queen of all—more beautiful in her garish style than Lucknow, whether you see her from the bridge over the river, or from the top of the Imambara looking down on the gilt umbrellas of the Chutter Munzil, and the trees in which the town is bedded. Kings have adorned her with fantastic buildings, endowed her with charities, crammed her with pensioners, and drenched her with blood. She is the centre of all idleness, intrigue, and luxury, and shares with Delhi the claim to talk the only pure Urdu.

‘A fair city—a beautiful city.’ The driver, as a Lucknow man, was pleased with the compliment, and told Kim many astounding things where an English guide would have talked of the Mutiny.

‘Now we will go to the school,’ said Kim at last. The great old school of St. Xavier’s in Partibus, block on block of low white buildings, stands in vast grounds over against the Gumti River, at some distance from the city.

‘What like of folk are they within?’ said Kim.

‘Young Sahibs—all devils; but to speak truth, and I drive many of them to and fro from the railway station, I have never seen one that had in him the making of a more perfect devil than thou—this young Sahib whom I am now driving.’

Naturally, for he was never trained to consider them in any way improper, Kim had passed the time of day with one or two frivolous ladies at upper windows in a certain street, and naturally, in the exchange of compliments, had acquitted himself well. He was about to acknowledge the driver’s last insolence, when his eye—it was growing dusk—caught a figure sitting by one of the white plaster gate-pillars in the long sweep of wall.

KIM

'Stop!' he cried. 'Stay here! I do not go to the school at once.'

'But what is to pay me for this coming and recoming?' said the driver petulantly. 'Is the boy mad? Last time it was a dancing-girl. This time it is a priest.'

Kim was in the road headlong, patting the dusty feet beneath the dirty yellow robe.

'I have waited here a day and a half,' the lama's level voice began. 'Nay, I had a disciple with me. He that was my friend at the Temple of the Tirthankers gave me a guide for this journey. I came from Benares in the train, when thy letter was given me. Yes, I am well fed. I need nothing.'

'But why didst thou not stay with the Kulu woman, O Holy One? In what way didst thou get to Benares? My heart has been heavy since we parted.'

'The woman wearied me by constant flux of talk and requiring charms for children. I separated myself from that company, permitting her to acquire merit by gifts. She is at least a woman of open hands, and I made a promise to return to her house if need arose. Then, perceiving myself alone in this great and terrible world, I bethought me of the te-rain to Benares, where I knew one abode in the Tirthankers' Temple who was a Seeker, even as I.'

'Ah! Thy River,' said Kim. 'I had forgotten the River.'

'So soon, my chela? I have never forgotten it; but when I had left thee it seemed better that I should go to the temple and take counsel, for, look you, India is very large, and it may be that wise men before us, some two or three, have left a record of the place of our River. There is debate in the Temple of the Tirthankers on

this matter; some saying one thing, and some another. They are courteous folk.'

'So be it; but what dost thou do now?'

'I acquire merit in that I help thee, my chela, to wisdom. The priest of that body of men who serve the Red Bull wrote me that all should be as I desired for thee. I sent the money to suffice for one year, and then I came, as thou seest me, to watch for thee going up into the Gates of Learning. A day and a half have I waited—not because I was led by any affection towards thee—that is not part of the Way—but, as they said at the Tirthankers' Temple, because, money having been paid for learning, it was right that I should oversee the end of the matter. They resolved my doubts most clearly. I had a fear that, perhaps, I came because I wished to see thee—misguided by the red mist of affection. It is not so. . . . Moreover, I am troubled by a dream.'

'But surely, Holy One, thou hast not forgotten the Road and all that befell on it. Surely it was a little to see me that thou didst come?'

'The horses are cold, and it is past their feeding-time,' whined the driver.

'Go to Jehannum and abide there with thy reputationless aunt!' Kim snarled over his shoulder. 'I am all alone in this land; I know not where I go nor what shall befall me. My heart was in that letter I sent thee. Except for Mahbub Ali, and he is a Pathan, I have no friend save thee, Holy One. Do not altogether go away.'

'I have considered that also,' the lama replied, in a shaking voice. 'It is manifest that from time to time I shall acquire merit—if before that I have not found

my River—by assuring myself that thy feet are set on wisdom. What they will teach thee I do not know, but the priest wrote me that no son of a Sahib in all India will be better taught than thou. So from time to time, therefore, I will come again. May be thou wilt be such a Sahib as he who gave me these spectacles—the lama wiped them elaborately—in the Wonder House at Lahore. That is my hope, for he was a Fountain of Wisdom—wiser than many abbots. . . . Again, may be thou wilt forget me and our meetings.'

'If I eat thy bread,' cried Kim passionately, 'how shall I ever forget thee?'

'No—no.' He put the boy aside. 'I must go back to Benares. From time to time, now that I know the customs of letter-writers in this land, I will send thee a letter, and from time to time I will come and see thee.'

'But whither shall I send my letters?' wailed Kim, clutching at the robe, all forgetful that he was a Sahib.

'To the Temple of the Tirthankers at Benares. That is the place I have chosen till I find my River. Do not weep; for, look you, all Desire is illusion and a new binding upon the Wheel. Go up to the Gates of Learning. Let me see thee go. . . . Dost thou love me? Then go, or my heart cracks. . . . I will come again. Surely I will come again.'

The lama watched the ticca-garri rumble into the compound, and strode off, snuffing between each long stride.

'The Gates of Learning' shut with a clang.

. . .
The country born and bred boy has his own manners and customs, which do not resemble those of any other land; and his teachers approach him by roads which an English master would not understand. Therefore, you

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would scarcely be interested in Kim's experiences as a St. Xavier's boy among two or three hundred precocious youths, most of whom had never seen the sea. He suffered the usual penalties for breaking out of bounds when there was cholera in the city. This was before he had learned to write fair English, and so was obliged to find a bazar letter-writer. He was, of course, indicted for smoking and for the use of abuse more full-flavoured than even St. Xavier's had ever heard. He learned to wash himself with the Levitical scrupulosity of the native-born, who in his heart considers the Englishman rather dirty. He played the usual tricks on the patient coolies pulling the punkahs in the sleeping-rooms where the boys thrashed through the hot nights telling tales till the dawn; and quietly he measured himself against his self-reliant mates.

They were sons of subordinate officials in the Railway, Telegraph, and Canal services; of warrant-officers, sometimes retired and sometimes acting as commanders-in-chief to a feudatory Rajah's army; of captains of the Indian Marine, Government pensioners, planters, Presidency shopkeepers, and missionaries. A few were cadets of the old Eurasian houses that have taken strong root in Dhurrumtollah—Pereiras, De Souzas, and D'Silvas. Their parents could well have educated them in England, but they loved the school that had served their own youth, and generation followed sallow-hued generation at St. Xavier's. Their homes ranged from Howrah of the railway people to abandoned cantonments like Monghyr and Chunar; lost tea-gardens Shillong-way; villages where their fathers were large landholders in Oudh or the Deccan; Mission-stations a week from the nearest railway line; seaports a thousand

miles south, facing the brazen Indian surf; and cinchona-plantations south of all. The mere story of their adventures, which to them were no adventures, on their road to and from school would have crisped a Western boy's hair. They were used to jogging off alone through a hundred miles of jungle, where there was always the delightful chance of being delayed by tigers; but they would no more have bathed in the English Channel in an English August than their brothers across the world would have lain still while a leopard snuffed at their palanquin. There were boys of fifteen who had spent a day and a half on an islet in the middle of a flooded river, taking charge, as by right, of a camp of frantic pilgrims returning from a shrine; there were seniors who had requisitioned a chance-met Rajah's elephant, in the name of St. Francis Xavier, when the rains once blotted out the cart-track that led to their father's estate, and had all but lost the huge beast in a quicksand. There was a boy who, he said, and none doubted, had helped his father to beat off with rifles from the veranda a rush of Akas in the days when those head-hunters were bold against lonely plantations.

And every tale was told in the even, passionless voice of the native-born, mixed with quaint reflections, borrowed unconsciously from native foster-mothers, and turns of speech that showed they had been that instant translated from the vernacular. Kim watched, listened, and approved. This was not insipid, single-word talk of drummer-boys. It dealt with a life he knew and in part understood. The atmosphere suited him, and he thronged by inches. They gave him a white drill suit as the weather warmed, and he rejoiced in the new-found bodily comforts as he rejoiced to use his sharpened mind

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over the tasks they set him. His quickness would have delighted an English master; but at St. Xavier's they know the first rush of minds developed by sun and surroundings, as well as they know the half-collapse that sets in at twenty-two or twenty-three.

None the less he remembered to hold himself lowly. When tales were told of hot nights, Kim did not sweep the board with his reminiscences; for St. Xavier's looks down on boys who 'go native altogether.' One must never forget that one is a Sahib, and that some day, when examinations are passed, one will command natives. Kim made a note of this, for he began to understand where examinations led.

Then came the holidays from August to October—the long holidays imposed by the heat and the rains. Kim was informed that he would go north to some station in the hills behind Umballa, where Father Victor would arrange for him.

'A barrack-school?' said Kim, who had asked many questions and thought more.

'Yes, I suppose so,' said the master. 'It will not do you any harm to keep you out of mischief. You can go up with young De Castro as far as Delhi.'

Kim considered it in every possible light. He had been diligent, even as the Colonel advised. A boy's holiday was his own property,—of so much the talk of his companions had advised him,—and a barrack-school would be torment after St. Xavier's. Moreover—this was magic worth anything else—he could write. In three months he had discovered how men can speak to each other without a third party, at the cost of half an anna and a little knowledge. No word had come from the lama, but there remained the Road. Kim yearned

for the caress of soft mud squishing up between the toes, as his mouth watered for mutton stewed with butter and cabbages, for rice speckled with strong-scented cardamoms, for the saffron-tinted rice, garlic and onions, and the forbidden greasy sweetmeats of the bazars. They would feed him raw beef on a platter at the barrack-school, and he must smoke by stealth. But again, he was a Sahib and was at St. Xavier's, and that pig Mahbub Ali . . . No, he would not test Mahbub's hospitality—and yet . . . He thought it out alone in the dormitory, and came to the conclusion he had been unjust to Mahbub.

The school was empty; nearly all the masters had gone away; Colonel Creighton's railway-pass lay in his hand, and Kim puffed himself that he had not spent Colonel Creighton's or Mahbub's money in riotous living. He was still lord of two rupees seven annas. His new bullock-trunk, marked 'K. O'H.', and bedding-roll lay in the empty sleeping-room. 'Sahibs are always tied to their baggage,' said Kim, nodding at them. 'You will stay here.' He went out into the warm rain, smiling sinfully, and sought a certain house whose outside he had noted down some time before. . . .

'Arre! Dost thou know what manner of women we be in this quarter? O shame!'

'Was I born yesterday?' Kim squatted native fashion on the cushions of that upper room. 'A little dye-stuff and three yards of cloth to help out a jest. Is it much to ask?'

'Who is she? Thou art full young, as Sahibs go, for this devilry.'

'Oh, she? She is the daughter of a certain school-master of a regiment in the cantonments. He has

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beaten me twice because I went over their wall in these clothes. Now I would go as a gardener's boy. Old men are very jealous.'

'That is true. Hold thy face still while I dab on the juice.'

'Not too black, Naikan. I would not appear to her as a hubshi' (nigger).

'Oh, love makes nought of these things. And how old is she?'

'Twelve years, I think,' said the shameless Kim. 'Spread it also on the breast. It may be her father will tear my clothes off me and if I am piebald—' he laughed.

The girl worked busily, dabbing a twist of cloth into a little saucer of brown dye that holds longer than any walnut juice.

'Now send out and get me a cloth for the turban. Woe is me, my head is all unshaved! And he will surely knock off my turban.'

'I am not a barber, but I will make shift. Thou wast born to be a breaker of hearts! All this disguise for one evening? Remember, the stuff does not wash away.' She shook with laughter till her bracelets and anklets jingled. 'But who is to pay me for this? Huneefa herself could not have given thee better stuff.'

'Trust in the Gods, my sister,' said Kim gravely screwing his face round as the stain dried. 'Besides, hast thou ever helped to paint a Sahib thus before?'

'Never indeed. But a jest is not money.'

'It is worth much more.'

'Child, thou art beyond all dispute the most shameless son of Shaitan that I have ever known to take up a poor girl's time with this play, and then to say: "Is not

the jest enough?" "Thou wilt go very far in this world.' She gave the dancing-girls' salutation in mockery.

'All one. Make haste and rough-cut my head.' Kim shifted from foot to foot, his eyes ablaze with mirth as he thought of the fat days before him. He gave the girl four annas, and ran down the stairs in the likeness of a low-caste Hindu boy—perfect in every detail. A cookshop was his next point of call, where he feasted in extravagance and greasy luxury.

On Lucknow station platform he watched young De Castro, all covered with prickly-heat, get into a second-class compartment. Kim patronised a third, and was the life and soul of it. He explained to the company that he was assistant to a juggler who had left him behind sick with fever, and that he would pick up his master at Umballa. As the occupants of the carriage changed, he varied this tale, or adorned it with all the shoots of a budding fancy, the more rampant for being held off native speech so long. In all India that night was no human being so joyful as Kim. At Umballa he got out and headed eastward, plashing over the sodden fields to the village where the old soldier lived.

About this time Colonel Creighton at Simla was advised from Lucknow by wire that young O'Hara had disappeared. Mahbub Ali was in town selling horses, and to him the Colonel confided the affair one morning cantering round ~~An~~ Annandale race-course.

'Oh, that is nothing,' said the horse-dealer. 'Men are like horses. At certain times they need salt, and if that salt is not in the mangers they will lick it up from the earth. He has gone back to the Road again for a while. The madrissah wearied him. I knew it would. Another time, I will take him upon the Road myself.'

Do not be troubled, Creighton Sahib. It is as though a polo-pony, breaking loose, ran out to learn the game alone.'

'Then he is not dead, think you?'

'Fever might kill him. I do not fear for the boy otherwise. A monkey does not fall among trees.'

Next morning, on the same course, Mahbub's stallion ranged alongside the Colonel.

'It is as I had thought,' said the horse-dealer. 'He has come through Umballa at least, and there he has written a letter to me, having learned in the bazar that I was here.'

'Read,' said the Colonel, with a sigh of relief. It was absurd that a man of his position should take an interest in a little country-bred vagabond; but the Colonel remembered the conversation in the train, and often in the past few months had caught himself thinking of the queer, silent, self-possessed boy. His evasion, of course, was the height of insolence, but it argued some resource and nerve.

Mahbub's eyes twinkled as he reined out into the centre of the cramped little plain, where none could come near unseen.

"The Friend of the Stars, who is the Friend of all the World—"

'What is this?'

'A name we give him in Lahore ~~city~~. "The Friend of all the World takes leave to go to his own places. He will come back upon the appointed day. Let the box and the bedding-roll be sent for; and if there has been a fault, let the Hand of Friendship turn aside the Whip of Calamity." There is yet a little more, but—'

'No matter, read.'

“‘Certain things are not known to those who eat with forks. It is better to eat with both hands for a while. Speak soft words to those who do not understand this that the return may be propitious.’” Now the manner in which that was cast is of course the work of the letter-writer, but see how wisely the boy has devised the matter of it so that no hint is given except to those who know!’

‘Is this the Hand of Friendship to avert the Whip of Calamity?’ laughed the Colonel.

‘See how wise is the boy. He would go back to the Road again, as I said. Not knowing yet thy trade—’

‘I am not quite sure of that,’ the Colonel muttered.

‘He turns to me to make a peace between you. Is he not wise? He says he will return. He is but perfecting his knowledge. Think, Sahib! He has been three months at the school. And he is not mouthed to that bit. For my part, I rejoice: the pony learns the game.’

‘Ay, but another time he must not go alone.’

‘Why? He went alone before he came under the Colonel Sahib’s protection. When he comes to the Great Game he must go alone—alone, and at peril of his head. Then, if he spits, or sneezes, or sits down other than as the people do whom he watches, he may be slain. Why hinder him now? Remember how the Persians say: The jackal that lives in the wilds of Mazanderan can only be caught by the hounds of Mazanderan.’

‘True. It is true, Mahbub Ali. And if he comes to no harm, I do not desire anything better. But it is great insolence on his part.’

‘He does not tell me, even, whither he goes,’ said Mahbub. ‘He is no fool. When his time is accom-

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plished he will come to me. It is time the healer of pearls took him in hand. He ripens too quickly—as Sahibs reckon.'

This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter a month later. Mahbub had gone down to Umballa to bring up a fresh consignment of horses, and Kim met him on the Kalka road at dusk riding alone, begged an alms of him, was sworn at, and replied in English. There was nobody within earshot to hear Mahbub's gasp of amazement.

'Oho! And where hast thou been?'

'Up and down—down and up.'

'Come under a tree, out of the wet, and tell.'

'I stayed for a while with an old man near Umballa; anon with a household of my acquaintance in Umballa. With one of these I went as far as Delhi to the southward. That is a wondrous city. Then I drove a bullock for a teli (an oilman) coming north; but I heard of a great feast forward in Puttiala, and thither went I in the company of a firework-maker. It was a great feast' (Kim rubbed his stomach). 'I saw Rajahs, and elephants with gold and silver trappings; and they lit all the fireworks at once, whereby eleven men were killed, my firework-maker among them, and I was blown across a tent but took no harm. Then I came back to the rel with a Sikh horseman, to whom I was groom for my bread; and so here.'

'Shabash!' said Mahbub Ali.

'But what does the Colonel Sahib say? I do not wish to be beaten.'

'The Hand of Friendship has averted the Whip of Calamity; but another time, when thou takest the Road it will be with me. This is too early.'

'Late enough for me. I have learned to read and to

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write English a little at the madrissah. I shall soon be altogether a Sahib.'

'Hear him!' laughed Mahbub, looking at the little drenched figure dancing in the wet. 'Salaam—Sahib,' and he saluted ironically. 'Well, art tired of the Road, or wilt thou come on to Umballa with me and work back with the horses?'

'I come with thee, Mahbub Ali.'

CHAPTER VIII

“Something I owe to the soil that grew—
More to the life that fed—
But most to Allah Who gave me two
Separate sides to my head.

I would go without shirts or shoes,
Friends, tobacco or bread
Sooner than for an instant lose
Either side of my head.’

‘**T**HEN in God’s Name take blue for red,’ said Mahbub, alluding to the Hindu colour of Kim’s disreputable turban.

Kim countered with the old proverb, ‘I will change my faith and my bedding, but thou must pay for it.’

The dealer laughed till he nearly fell from his horse. At a shop on the outskirts of the city the change was made, and Kim stood up, externally at least, a Mohammedan.

Mahbub hired a room over against the railway station, sent for a cooked meal of the finest with almond-curd sweetmeats (balushai we call it) and fine-chopped Lucknow tobacco.

‘This is better than some other meat that I ate with the Sikh,’ said Kim, grinning as he squatted, ‘and assuredly they give no such victuals at my madrissah.’

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‘I have a desire to hear of that same madrissah.’ Mahbub stuffed himself with great boluses of spiced mutton fried in fat with cabbage and golden-brown onions. ‘But tell me first, altogether and truthfully, the manner of thy escape. For, O Friend of all the World,’—he loosed his cracking belt,—‘I do not think it is often that a Sahib and the son of a Sahib runs away from there.’

‘How should they? They do not know the land. It was nothing,’ said Kim, and began his tale. When he came to the disguisement and the interview with the girl in the bazar, Mahbub Ali’s gravity went from him. He laughed aloud and beat his hand on his thigh.

‘Shabash! Shabash! Oh, well done, little one! What will the healer of turquoises say to this? Now, slowly, let us hear what befell afterwards—step by step, omitting nothing.’

Step by step then, Kim told his adventures between coughs as the full-flavoured tobacco caught his lungs.

‘I said,’ growled Mahbub Ali to himself, ‘I said it was the pony breaking out to play polo. The fruit is ripe already—except that he must learn his distances and his pacings, and his rods and his compasses. Listen now. I have turned aside the Colonel’s whip from thy skin, and that is no small service.’

‘True.’ Kim puffed serenely. ‘That is all true.’

‘But it is not to be thought that this running out and in is any way good.’

‘It was my holiday, Hajji. I was a slave for many weeks. Why should I not run away when the school was shut? Look, too, how I, living upon my friends or working for my bread, as I did with the Sikh, have saved the Colonel Sahib a great expense.’

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Mahbub's lips twitched under his well-pruned Mohammedan moustache.

'What are a few rupees?'—the Pathan threw out his open hand carelessly—'to the Colonel Sahib? He spends them for a purpose, not in any way for love of thee.'

'That,' said Kim slowly, 'I knew a very long time ago.'

'Who told?'

'The Colonel Sahib himself. Not in those many words, but plainly enough for one who is not altogether a mud-head. Yea, he told me in the te-rain when we went down to Lucknow.'

'Be it so. Then I will tell thee more, Friend of all the World, though in the telling I lend thee my head.'

'It was forfeit to me,' said Kim, with deep relish, 'in Umballa, when thou didst pick me up on the horse after the drummer-boy beat me.'

'Speak a little plainer. All the world may tell lies save thou and I. For equally is thy life forfeit to me if I chose to raise my finger here.'

'And this is known to me also,' said Kim, readjusting the live charcoal-ball on the weed. 'It is a very sure tie between us. Indeed thy hold is surer even than mine; for who would miss a boy beaten to death, or, it may be, thrown into a well by the roadside? Many people here and in Simla and across the passes behind the Hills would, on the other hand, say: "What has come to Mahbub Ali," if he were found dead among his horses. Surely too the Colonel Sahib would make inquiries. But again,'—Kim's face puckered with cunning,—'he would not make overlong inquiry, lest people should ask: "What has this Colonel Sahib to do with that horse-dealer?"' But I—if I lived—'

‘As thou wouldest surely die—’

‘It may be; but I say, if I lived, I, and I alone, would know that one had come by night, as a common thief perhaps, to Mahbub Ali’s bulkhead in the serai, and there had slain him, either before or after that thief had made a full search into his saddle-bags and between the soles of his slippers. Is that news to tell to the Colonel, or would he say to me—(I have not forgotten when he sent me back for a cigar-case that he had not left behind him)—“What is Mahbub Ali to me?”’

Up went a gout of heavy smoke. There was a long pause; then Mahbub Ali spoke in admiration: ‘And with these things on thy mind, dost thou lie down and rise again among all the Sahibs’ little sons at the madrissah and meekly take instruction from thy teachers?’

‘It is an order,’ said Kim blandly. ‘Who am I to dispute an order?’

‘A most finished son of Eblis,’ said Mahbub Ali. ‘But what is this tale of the thief and the search?’

‘That which I saw,’ said Kim, ‘the night that my lama and I lay next thy place in the Kashmir Serai. The door was left unlocked, which I think is not thy custom, Mahbub. He came in as one assured that thou wouldest not soon return. My eye was against a knot-hole in the plank. He searched as it were for something—not a rug, not stirrups, nor a bridle, nor brass pots—something little and most carefully hid. Else why did he prick with an iron between the soles of thy slippers?’

‘Ha!’ Mahbub Ali smiled gently. ‘And seeing these things, what tale didst thou fashion to thyself, Well of the Truth?’

‘None. I put my hand upon my amulet, which lies always next to my skin, and, remembering the pedigree

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of a white stallion that I had bitten out of a piece of Mussalmani bread, I went away to Umballa perceiving that a heavy trust was laid upon me. At that hour, had I chosen, thy head was forfeit. It needed only to say to that man, "I have here a paper concerning a horse which I cannot read." And then?" Kim peered at Mahbub under his eyebrows.

'Then thou wouldest have drunk water twice—perhaps thrice, afterwards. I do not think more than thrice,' said Mahbub simply.

'It is true. I thought of that a little, but most I thought that I loved thee, Mahbub. Therefore I went to Umballa, as thou knowest, but (and this thou dost not know) I lay hid in the garden-grass to see what Colonel Creighton Sahib might do upon reading the white stallion's pedigree.'

'And what did he?' for Kim had bitten off the conversation.

'Dost thou give news for love, or dost thou sell it?' Kim asked.

'I sell and—I buy.' Mahbub took a four-anna piece out of his belt and held it up.

'Eight!' said Kim, mechanically following the huckster instinct of the East.

Mahbub laughed, and put away the coin. 'It is too easy to deal in that market, Friend of all the World. Tell me for love. Our lives lie in each other's hand.'

'Very good. I saw the Jang-i-Lat Sahib (the Commander-in-Chief) come to a big dinner. I saw him in Creighton Sahib's office. I saw the two read the white stallion's pedigree. I heard the very orders given for the opening of a great war.'

'Hah!' Mahbub nodded with deepest eyes afire.

'The game is well played. That war is done now, and the evil, we hope, nipped before the flower—thanks to me—and thee. What didst thou later?'

'I made the news as it were a hook to catch me victual and honour among the villagers in a village whose priest drugged my lama. But I bore away the old man's purse, and the Brahmin found nothing. So next morning he was angry. Ho! Ho! And I also used the news when I fell into the hands of that white regiment with their Bull!'

'That was foolishness.' Mahbub scowled. 'News is not meant to be thrown about like dung-cakes, but used sparingly—like bhang.'

'So I think now, and, moreover, it did me no sort of good. But that was very long ago,'—he made as to brush it all away with a thin brown hand,—'and since then, and especially in the nights under the punkah at the madrissah, I have thought very greatly.'

'Is it permitted to ask whither the Heaven-born's thought might have led?' said Mahbub, with an elaborate sarcasm, smoothing his scarlet beard.

'It is permitted,' said Kim, and threw back the very tone. 'They say at Nucklao that no Sahib must tell a black man that he has made a fault.'

Mahbub's hand shot into his bosom, for to call a Pathan a 'black man' (*kala admi*) is a blood-insult. Then he remembered and laughed. 'Speak, Sahib: thy black man hears.'

'But,' said Kim, 'I am not a Sahib, and I say I made a fault when I cursed thee, Mahbub Ali, on the day at Umballa I thought I was betrayed by a Pathan. I was senseless; for I was but newly caught, and I wished to kill that low-caste drummer-boy. I say now, Hajji, that

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it was well done; and I see my road all clear before me to a good service. I will stay in the madrissah till I am ripe.'

'Well said. Especially are distances and numbers and the manner of using compasses to be learned in that game. One waits in the Hills above to show thee.'

'I will learn their teaching upon a condition—that my time is given to me without question when the madrissah is shut. Ask that for me of the Colonel.'

'But why not ask the Colonel in the Sahib's tongue?'

'The Colonel is the servant of the Government. He is sent hither and yon at a word, and must consider his own advancement. (See how much I have already learned at Nucklao!) Moreover, the Colonel I know since three months only. I have known one Mahbub Ali for six years. So! To the madrissah I will go. At the madrissah I will learn. In the madrissah I will be a Sahib. But when the madrissah is shut, then must I be free and go among my people. Otherwise I die!'

'And who are thy People, Friend of all the World?'

'This great and beautiful land,' said Kim, waving his paw round the little clay-walled room where the oil-lamp in its niche burned heavily through the tobacco-smoke. 'And, further, I would see my lama again. And further, I need money.'

'That is the need of every one,' said Mahbub ruefully. 'I will give thee eight annas, for much money is not picked out of horses' hooves, and it must suffice for many days. As to all the rest, I am well pleased, and no further talk is needed. Make haste to learn, and in three years, or it may be less, thou wilt be an aid—even to me.'

'Have I been such a hindrance till now?' said Kim, with a boy's giggle.

KIM

'Do not give answers,' Mahbub grunted. 'Thou art my new horse-boy. Go and bed among my men. They are near the north end of the station, with the horses.'

'They will beat me to the south end of the station if I come without authority.'

Mahbub felt in his belt, wetted his thumb on a cake of Chinese ink, and dabbed the impression on a piece of soft native paper. From Balkh to Bombay men know that rough-ridged print with the old scar running diagonally across it.

'That is enough to show my headman. I come in the morning.'

'By which road?' said Kim.

'By the road from the City. There is but one, and then we return to Creighton Sahib. I have saved thee a beating.'

'Allah! What is a beating when the very head is loose on the shoulders?'

Kim slid out quietly into the night, walked half round the house, keeping close to the walls, and headed away from the station for a mile or so. Then, fetching a wide compass, he worked back at leisure, for he needed time to invent a story if any of Mahbub's retainers asked questions.

They were camped on a piece of waste ground beside the railway, and, being natives, had not, of course, unloaded the two trucks in which Mahbub's animals stood among a consignment of country-breds bought by the Bombay tram-company. The headman, a broken-down, consumptive-looking Mohammedan, promptly challenged Kim, but was pacified at sight of Mahbub's sign-manual.

KIM

‘The Hajji has of his favour given me service,’ said Kim testily. ‘If this be doubted, wait till he comes in the morning. Meantime, a place by the fire.’

Followed the usual aimless babble that every low-caste native must raise on every occasion. It died down, and Kim lay out behind the little knot of Mahbub’s followers, almost under the wheels of a horse-truck, a borrowed blanket for covering. Now a bed among brickbats and ballast-refuse on a damp night, between overcrowded horses and unwashen Baltis, would not appeal to many white boys; but Kim was utterly happy. Change of scene, service, and surroundings were the breath of his little nostrils, and thinking of the neat white cots of St. Xavier’s all arow under the punkah gave him joy as keen as the repetition of the multiplication-table in English.

‘I am very old,’ he thought sleepily. ‘Every month I become a year more old. I was very young, and a fool to boot, when I took Mahbub’s message to Umballa. Even when I was with that white regiment I was very young and small and had no wisdom. But now I learn every day, and in three years the Colonel will take me out of the madrissah and let me go upon the Road with Mahbub hunting for horses’ pedigrees, or maybe I shall go by myself; or maybe I shall find the lama and go with him. Yes; that is best. To walk again as a chela with my lama when he comes back to Benares.’ The thoughts came more slowly and disconnectedly. He was plunging into a beautiful dreamland when his ears caught a whisper, thin and sharp, above the monotonous babble round the fire. It came from behind the iron-skinned horse-truck.

‘He is not here then?’

KIM

‘Where should he be but roystering in the City. Who looks for a rat in a frog-pond? Come away. He is not our man.’

‘He must not go back beyond the Passes a second time. It is the order.’

‘Hire some woman to drug him. It is a few rupees only, and there is no evidence.’

‘Except the woman. It must be more certain; and remember the price upon his head.’

‘Ay, but the police have a long arm, and we are far from the Border. If it were in Peshawur now!’

‘Yes—in Peshawur,’ the second voice sneered. ‘Peshawur, full of his blood-kin—full of bolt-holes and women behind whose clothes he will hide. Yes, Peshawur or Jehannum would suit us equally well.’

‘Then what is the plan?’

‘O fool, have I not told it a hundred times. Wait till he comes to lie down, and then one sure shot. The trucks are between us and pursuit. We have but to run back over the lines and go our way. They will not see whence the shot came. Wait here at least till the dawn. What manner of faqir art thou to shiver at a little watching?’

‘Oho!’ thought Kim, behind close-shut eyes. ‘Once again it is Mahbub. Indeed a white stallion’s pedigree is not a good thing to peddle to Sahibs! Or maybe Mahbub has been selling other news. Now what is to do, Kim? I know not where Mahbub houses, and if he comes here before the dawn they will shoot him. That would be no profit for thee, Kim. And this is not a matter for the police. That would be no profit for Mahbub; and,’ he giggled almost aloud, ‘I do not remember any lesson at Nucklao which will help me.

KIM

Allah! Here is Kim and yonder are they. First then, Kim must wake and go away, so that they shall not suspect. A bad dream wakes a man—thus—'

He threw the blanket off his face, and raised himself suddenly with the terrible, bubbling, meaningless yell of the Asiatic roused by nightmare.

'Urr-urr-urr-urr! Ya-la-la-la-la! Narain! The churel! The churel!'

A churel is the peculiarly malignant ghost of a woman who has died in child-bed. She haunts lonely roads, her feet are turned backwards on the ankles, and she leads men to torment.

Louder rose Kim's quavering howl, till at last he leaped to his feet and staggered off sleepily, while the camp cursed him for waking them. Some twenty yards farther up the line he lay down again, taking care that the whisperers should hear his grunts and groans as he recomposed himself. After a few minutes he rolled towards the road and stole away into the thick darkness.

He paddled along swiftly till he came to a culvert, and dropped behind it, his chin on a level with the coping-stone. Here he could command all the night-traffic, himself unseen.

Two or three carts passed, jingling out to the suburbs; a coughing policeman and a hurrying foot-passenger or two who sang to keep off evil spirits. Then rapped the shod feet of a horse.

'Ah! This is more like Mahbub,' thought Kim, as the beast shied at the little head above the culvert.

'Ohe, Mahbub Ali,' he whispered, 'have a care!'

The horse was reined back almost on its haunches, and forced towards the culvert.

'Never again,' said Mahbub, 'will I take a shod horse

KIM

for night-work. They pick up all the bones and nails in the city.' He stooped to lift its forefoot, and that brought his head within a foot of Kim's. 'Down—keep down,' he muttered. 'The night is full of eyes.'

'Two men wait thy coming behind the horse-trucks. They will shoot thee at thy lying down, because there is a price on thy head. I heard, sleeping near the horses.'

'Didst thou see them? . . . Hold still, Sire of Devils!' This furiously to the horse.

'No.'

'Was one dressed belike as a faquir?'

'One said to the other, "What manner of a faquir art thou, to shiver at a little watching?"'

'Good. Go back to the camp and lie down. I do not die to-night.'

Mahbub wheeled his horse and vanished. Kim tore back down the ditch till he reached a point opposite his second resting-place, slipped across the road like a weasel, and recoiled himself in the blanket.

'At least Mahbub knows,' he thought contentedly. 'And certainly he spoke as one expecting it. I do not think those two men will profit by to-night's watch.'

An hour passed, and, with the best will in the world to keep awake all night, he slept deeply. Now and again a night train roared along the metals within twenty feet of him; but he had all the Oriental's indifference to mere noise, and it did not even weave a dream through his slumber.

Mahbub was anything but asleep. It annoyed him vehemently that people outside his tribe and unaffected by his casual amours should pursue him for the life. His first and natural impulse was to cross the line lower down, work up again, and, catching his well-wishers

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from behind, summarily slay them. Here, he reflected with sorrow, another branch of the Government, totally unconnected with Colonel Creighton, might demand explanations which would be hard to supply; and he knew that south the Border a perfectly ridiculous fuss is made about a corpse or so. He had not been troubled in this way since he sent Kim to Umballa with the message, and hoped that suspicion had been finally diverted.

Then a most brilliant notion struck him.

'The English do eternally tell the truth,' he said, 'therefore we of this country are eternally made foolish. By Allah, I will tell the truth to an Englishman! Of what use is the Government police if a poor Kabuli be robbed of his horses in their very trucks. This is as bad as Peshawur! I should lay a complaint at the station. Better still, some young Sahib on the Railway! They are zealous, and if they catch thieves it is remembered to their honour.'

He tied up his horse outside the station, and strode on to the platform.

'Hullo, Mahbub Ali!' said a young Assistant District Traffic Superintendent who was waiting to go down the line—a tall, tow-haired, horsey youth in dingy white linen. 'What are you doing here? Selling weeds—eh?'

'No; I am not troubled for my horses. I come to look for Lutuf Ullah. I have a truck-load up the line. Could any one take them out without the Railway's knowledge?'

'Shouldn't think so, Mahbub. You can claim against us if they do.'

'I have seen two men crouching under the wheels of one of the trucks nearly all the night. Faquires do not

steal horses, so I gave them no more thought. I would find Lutuf Ullah, my partner.'

'The deuce you did? And you didn't bother your head about it? 'Pon my word, it's just almost as well that I met you. What were they like, eh?'

'They were only faquires. They will no more than take a little grain perhaps from one of the trucks. There are many up the line. The State will never miss the dole. I came here seeking for my partner, Lutuf Ullah—'

'Never mind your partner. Where are your horse-trucks?'

'A little to this side of the farthest place where they make lamps for the trains.'

'The signal-box. Yes.'

'And upon the rail nearest to the road upon the right-hand side—looking up the line thus. But as regards Lutuf Ullah—a tall man with a broken nose, and a Persian greyhound—Aie!'

The boy had hurried off to wake up a young and enthusiastic policeman; for, as he said, the Railway had suffered much from depredations in the goods-yard. Mahbub Ali chuckled in his dyed beard.

'They will walk in their boots, making a noise, and then they will wonder why there are no faquires. They are very clever boys—Barton Sahib and Young Sahib.'

He waited idly for a few minutes, expecting to see them hurry up the line girt for action. A light engine slid through the station, and he caught a glimpse of young Barton in the cab.

'I did that child an injustice. He is not altogether a fool,' said Mahbub Ali. 'To take a fire-carriage for a thief is a new game!'

KIM

When Mahbub Ali came to his camp in the dawn, no one thought it worth while to tell him any news of the night. No one, at least, but one small horse-boy, newly advanced to the great man's service, whom Mahbub called to his tiny tent to assist in some packing.

'It is all known to me,' whispered Kim, bending above saddle-bags. 'Two Sahibs came up on a te-rain. I was running to and fro in the dark on this side of the trucks as the te-rain moved up and down slowly. They fell upon two men sitting under this truck—Hajji, what shall I do with this lump of tobacco? Wrap it in paper and put it under the salt-bag? Yes—and struck them down. But one man struck at a Sahib with a faquir's buck's horn' (Kim meant the conjoined black-buck horns, which are a faquir's sole temporal weapon)—'the blood came. So the other Sahib, first smiting his own man senseless, smote the stabber with a short gun which had rolled from the first man's hand. They all raged as though mad together.'

Mahbub smiled with heavenly resignation. 'No! That is not so much dewanee (madness, or a case for the civil court—the word can be punned upon both ways) as nizamut (a criminal case). A gun sayest thou? Ten good years in jail.'

'Then they both lay still, but I think they were nearly dead when they were put on the te-rain. Their heads moved thus. And there is much blood on the line. Come and see?'

'I have seen blood before. Jail is the sure place—and assuredly they will give false names, and assuredly no man will find them for a long time. They were un-friends of mine. Thy Fate and mine seem on one string. What a tale for the healer of pearls! Now swiftly with

the saddle-bags and the cooking-platter. We will take out the horses and away to Simla.'

Swiftly,—as Orientals understand speed,—with long explanations, with abuse and windy talk, carelessly, amid a hundred checks for little things forgotten, the untidy camp broke up and led the half-dozen stiff and fretful horses along the Kalka road in the fresh of the rain-swept dawn. Kim, regarded as Mahbub Ali's favourite by all who wished to stand well with the Pathan, was not called upon to work. They strolled on by the easiest of stages, halting every few hours at a wayside shelter. Very many Sahibs travel along the Kalka road; and, as Mahbub Ali says, every young Sahib must needs esteem himself a judge of a horse, and, though he be over head in debt to the money-lender, must make as if to buy. That was the reason that Sahib after Sahib, rolling along in a stage-carriage, would stop and open talk. Some would even descend from their vehicles and feel the horses' legs; asking inane questions, or, through sheer ignorance of the vernacular, grossly insulting the imperturbable trader.

'When first I dealt with Sahibs, and that was when Colonel Soady Sahib was Governor of Fort Abazai and flooded the Commissioner's camping-ground for spite,' Mahbub confided to Kim as the boy filled his pipe under a tree, 'I did not know how greatly they were fools, and this made me wroth. As thus—' and he told Kim a tale of an expression, misused in all innocence, that doubled Kim up with mirth. 'Now I see, however,'—he exhaled smoke slowly,—'that it is with them as with all men—in certain matters they are wise, and in others most foolish. Very foolish it is to use the wrong word to a stranger; for though the heart may be clean of

KIM

offence, how is the stranger to know that? He is more like to search truth with a dagger.'

'True. True talk,' said Kim solemnly. 'Fools speak of a cat when a woman is brought to bed, for instance. I have heard them.'

'Therefore, in one situate as thou art, it particularly behoves thee to remember this with both kinds of faces. Among Sahibs, never forgetting thou art a Sahib; among the folk of Hind, always remembering thou art—' he paused, with a puzzled smile.

'What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard nut.'

'Thou art beyond question an unbeliever, and therefore thou wilt be damned. So says my Law—or I think it does. But thou art also my Little Friend of all the World, and I love thee. So says my heart. This matter of creeds is like horseflesh. The wise man knows horses are good—that there is a profit to be made from all; and for myself—but that I am a good Sunni and hate the men of Tirah—I could believe the same of all the Faiths. Now manifestly a Kattiawar mare taken from the sands of her birthplace and removed to the west of Bengal founders—nor is even a Balkh stallion (and there are no better horses than those of Balkh, were they not so heavy in the shoulder) of any account in the great Northern deserts beside the snow-camels I have seen. Therefore I say in my heart the Faiths are like the horses. Each has merit in its own country.'

'But my lama said altogether a different thing.'

'Oh, he is an old dreamer of dreams from Bhotiyal. My heart is a little angry, Friend of all the World, that thou shouldst see such worth in a man so little known.'

KIM

‘It is true, Hajji; but that worth do I see; and to him my heart is drawn.’

‘And his to thine, I hear. Hearts are like horses. They come and they go against bit or spur. Shout Gul Sher Khan yonder to drive in that bay stallion’s pickets more firmly. We do not want a horse-fight at every resting-stage, and the dun and the black will be locked in a little. . . . Now hear me. Is it necessary to the comfort of thy heart to see that lama?’

‘It is one part of my bond,’ said Kim. ‘If I do not see him, and if he is taken from me, I will go out of that madrissah in Nucklao and, and—once gone, who is to find me again?’

‘It is true. Never was colt held on a lighter heel-rope than thou.’ Mahbub nodded his head.

‘Do not be afraid.’ Kim spoke as though he could have evanished on the moment. ‘My lama has said that he will come to see me at the madrissah—’

‘A beggar and his bowl in the presence of those young Sa—’

‘Not all!’ Kim cut in with a snort. ‘Their eyes are blued and their nails are blackened with low-caste blood, many of them. Sons of metheeranees—brothers-in-law to the bhungi’ (sweeper).

We need not follow the rest of the pedigree; but Kim made his little point clearly and without heat, chewing a piece of sugar-cane the while.

‘Friend of all the World,’ said Mahbub, pushing over the pipe for the boy to clean, ‘I have met many men, women, and boys, and not a few Sahibs. I have never in all my days met such an imp as thou art.’

‘And why? When I always tell thee the truth.’

‘Perhaps the very reason, for this is a world of danger

KIM

to honest men.' Mahbub Ali hauled himself off the ground, girt in his belt, and went over to the horses.

'Or sell it?'

There was that in the tone that made Mahbub halt and turn. 'What new devilry?'

'Eight annas, and I will tell,' said Kim, grinning. 'It touches thy peace.'

'O Shaitan!' Mahbub gave the money.

'Rememberest thou the little business of the thieves in the dark, down yonder at Umballa?'

'Seeing they sought my life, I have not altogether forgotten. Why?'

'Rememberest thou the Kashmir Serai?'

'I will twist thy ears in a moment—Sahib.'

'No need—Pathan. Only, the second faqir, whom the Sahibs beat senseless, was the man who came to search thy bulkhead at Lahore. I saw his face as they helped him on the engine. The very same man.'

'Why didst thou not tell before?'

'Oh, he will go to jail, and be safe for some years. There is no need to tell more than is necessary at any one time. Besides, I did not then need money for sweetmeats.'

'Allah Karim!' said Mahbub Ali. 'Wilt thou some day sell my head for a few sweetmeats if the fit takes thee?'

Kim will remember till he dies that long, lazy journey from Umballa, through Kalka and the Pinjore Gardens near by, up to Simla. A sudden spate in the Gugger River swept down one horse (the most valuable, be sure), and nearly drowned Kim among the dancing boulders. Farther up the road the horses were stampeded by a Government elephant, and being in high condition of

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grass food, it cost a day and a half to get them together again. Then they met Sikandar Khan coming down with a few unsaleable screws,—remnants of his string,—and Mahbub, who has more of horse-coping in his little finger nail than Sikandar Khan in all his tents, must needs buy two of the worst, and that meant eight hours' laborious diplomacy and untold tobacco. But it was all pure delight—the wandering road, climbing, dipping, and sweeping about the growing spurs; the flush of the morning laid along the distant snows; the branched cacti, tier upon tier on the stony hillsides; the voices of a thousand water-channels; the chatter of the monkeys; the solemn deodars, climbing one after another with down-drooped branches; the vista of the Plains rolled out far beneath them; the incessant twanging of the tonga-horns and the wild rush of the led horses when a tonga swung round a curve; the halts for prayers (Mahbub was very religious in dry-washings and bellowings when time did not press); the evening conferences by the halting-places, when camels and bullocks chewed solemnly together and the stolid drivers told the news of the Road—all these things lifted Kim's heart to song within him.

'But, when the singing and dancing is done,' said Mahbub Ali, 'comes the Colonel Sahib's, and that is not so sweet.'

'A fair land—a most beautiful land is this of Hind—and the land of the Five Rivers is fairer than all,' Kim half chanted. 'Into it I will go again if Mahbub Ali or the Colonel lift hand or foot against me. Once gone, who shall find me? Look, Hajji, is yonder the city of Simla? Allah, what a city!'

'My father's brother, and he was an old man when

Mackerson Sahib's well was new at Peshawur, could recall when there were but two houses in it.'

He led the horses below the main road into the lower Simla bazar—the crowded rabbit-warren that climbs up from the valley to the town-hall at an angle of forty-five. A man who knows his way there can defy all the police of India's summer capital; so cunningly does veranda communicate with veranda, alley-way with alley-way, and bolt-hole with bolt-hole. Here live those who minister to the wants of the glad city—jhampanis who pull the pretty ladies' rickshaws by night and gamble till the dawn; grocers, oil-sellers, curio-vendors, fire-wood dealers, priests, pickpockets, and native employees of the Government: here are discussed by courtesans the things which are supposed to be profoundest secrets of the India Council; and here gather all the sub-sub-agents of half the native States. Here, too, Mahbub Ali rented a room, much more securely locked than his bulkhead at Lahore, in the house of a Mohammedan cattle-dealer. It was a place of miracles, too, for there went in at twilight a Mohammedan horse-boy, and there came out an hour later a Eurasian lad—the Lucknow girl's dye was of the best—in badly fitting shop-clothes.

'I have spoken with Creighton Sahib,' quoth Mahbub Ali, 'and a second time has the Hand of Friendship averted the Whip of Calamity. He says that thou hast altogether wasted sixty days upon the Road, and it is too late, therefore, to send thee to any hill-school.'

'I have said that my holidays are my own. I do not go to school twice over. That is one part of my bond.'

'The Colonel Sahib is not yet aware of the contract. Thou art to lodge in Lurgan Sahib's house till it is time to go again to Nucklao.'

KIM

‘I had sooner lodge with thee, Mahbub.’

‘Thou dost not know the honour. Lurgan Sahib himself asked for thee. Thou wilt go up the hill and along the road atop, and there thou must forget for a while that thou hast ever seen or spoken to me, Mahbub Ali, who sells horses to Creighton Sahib, whom thou dost not know. Remember this order.’

Kim nodded. ‘Good,’ said he, ‘and who is Lurgan Sahib? Nay’—he caught Mahbub’s sword-keen glance—‘indeed I have never heard his name. Is he by chance’—he lowered his voice—‘one of us?’

‘What talk is this of us, Sahib?’ Mahbub Ali returned, in the tone he used towards Europeans. ‘I am a Pathan; thou art a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Lurgan Sahib has a shop among the European shops. All Simla knows it. Ask there . . . and, Friend of all the World, he is one to be obeyed to the last wink of his eyelashes. Men say he does magic, but that should not touch thee. Go up the hill and ask. Here begins the Great Game.’

CHAPTER IX

S'doaks was son of Yelth the wise—
Chief of the Raven clan.
Itswoot the Bear had him in care
To make him a medicine-man.

He was quick and quicker to learn—
Bold and bolder to dare:
He danced the dread Kloo-Kwallie Dance
To tickle Itswoot the Bear!

‘Oregon Legend.’

KIM flung himself whole-heartedly upon the next turn of the wheel. He would be a Sahib again for a while. In that idea, so soon as he had reached the broad road under Simla town-hall, he cast about for one to impress. A Hindu child, some ten years old, squatted under a lamp-post.

‘Where is Mr. Lurgan’s house?’ demanded Kim.
‘I do not understand English,’ was the answer, and Kim shifted his speech accordingly.

‘I will show.’

Together they set off through the mysterious dusk, full of the noises of a city below the hillside, and the breath of a cool wind in deodar-crowned Jakko, shoudering the stars. The house-lights, scattered on every level, made, as it were, a double firmament. Some were

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fixed, others belonged to the rickshaws of the careless, open-spoken English folk, going out to dinner.

'It is here,' said Kim's guide, and halted in a veranda flush with the main road. No door stayed them, but a curtain of beaded reeds that split up the lamp-light beyond.

'He is come,' said the boy, in a voice little louder than a sigh, and vanished. Kim felt sure that the boy had been posted to guide him from the first, but putting a bold face on it, parted the curtain. A black-bearded man, with a green shade over his eyes, sat at a table, and, one by one, with short, white hands, picked up globules of light from a tray before him, threaded them on a glancing silken string, and hummed to himself the while. Kim was conscious that beyond the circle of light the room was full of things that smelt like all the temples of all the East. A whiff of musk, a puff of sandal-wood, and a breath of sickly jessamine-oil caught his opened nostrils.

'I am here,' said Kim at last, speaking in the vernacular: the smells made him forget that he was to be a Sahib.

'Seventy-nine, eighty, eighty-one,' the man counted to himself, stringing pearl after pearl so quickly that Kim could scarcely follow his fingers. He slid off the green shade and looked fixedly at Kim for a full half-minute. The pupils of the eye dilated and closed to pin-pricks, as if at will. There was a faqir by the Taksali Gate who had just this gift and made money by it, especially when cursing silly women. Kim stared with interest. His disreputable friend could further twitch his ears, almost like a goat, and Kim was disappointed that this new man could not imitate him.

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‘Do not be afraid,’ said Mr. Lurgan suddenly.

‘Why should I fear?’

‘Thou wilt sleep here to-night, and stay with me till it is time to go again to Nucklao. It is an order.’

‘It is an order,’ Kim repeated. ‘But where shall I sleep?’

‘Here, in this room.’ Lurgan Sahib waved his hand towards the darkness behind him.

‘So be it,’ said Kim composedly. ‘Now?’

He nodded and held the lamp above his head. As the light swept them, there leaped out from the walls a collection of Tibetan devil-dance masks, hanging above the fiend-embroidered draperies of those ghastly functions—horned masks, scowling masks, and masks of idiotic terror. In a corner, a Japanese warrior, mailed and plumed, menaced him with a halberd, and a score of lances and khandas and kuttars gave back the unsteady gleam. But what interested Kim more than all these things—he had seen devil-dance masks at the Lahore Museum—was a glimpse of the soft-eyed Hindu child who had left him in the doorway, sitting cross-legged under the table of pearls with a little smile on his scarlet lips.

‘I think that Lurgan Sahib wishes to make me afraid. And I am sure that the devil’s brat below the table wishes to see me afraid. This place,’ he said aloud, ‘is like a Wonder House. Where is my bed?’

Lurgan Sahib pointed to a native quilt in a corner by the loathsome masks, picked up the lamp, and left the room black.

‘Was that Lurgan Sahib?’ Kim asked as he cuddled down. No answer. He could hear the Hindu boy breathing, however, and, guided by the sound, crawled

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across the floor, and cuffed into the darkness, crying: 'Give answer, devil! Is this the way to lie to a Sahib?'

From the darkness he fancied he could hear the echo of a chuckle. It could not be his soft-fleshed companion, because he was weeping. So Kim lifted up his voice and called aloud: 'Lurgan Sahib! O Lurgan Sahib! Is it an order that thy servant does not speak to me?'

'It is an order.' The voice came from behind him and he started.

'Very good. But remember,' he muttered, as he resought the quilt, 'I will beat thee in the morning. I do not love Hindus.'

That was no cheerful night; the room being overfull of voices and music. Kim was waked twice by some one calling his name. The second time he set out in search, and ended by bruising his nose against a box that certainly spoke with a human tongue, but in no sort of human accent. It seemed to end in a tin trumpet and to be joined by wires to a smaller box on the floor—so far, at least, as he could judge by touch. And the voice, very hard and whirring, came out of the trumpet. Kim rubbed his nose and grew furious, thinking, as usual, in Hindi.

'This with a beggar from the bazar might be good but—I am a Sahib and the son of a Sahib and, which is twice as much more beside, a student of Nucklao. Yess' (here he turned to English), 'a boy of St. Xavier's. Damn Mr. Lurgan's eyes!—It is some sort of machinery like a sewing-machine. Oh, it is a great cheek of him—we are not frightened that way at Lucknow—No!' Then in Hindi: 'But what does he gain? He is only a trader—I am in his shop. But Creighton Sahib is a Colonel—and I think Creighton Sahib gave orders that

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it should be done. How I will beat that Hindu in the morning! What is this?

The trumpet-box was pouring out a string of the most elaborate abuse that even Kim had ever heard, in a high uninterested voice, that for a moment lifted the short hairs of his neck. When the vile thing drew breath, Kim was reassured by the soft, sewing-machine-like whirr.

‘Chup!’ (be still) he cried, and again he heard a chuckle that decided him. ‘Chup—or I break your head.’

The box took no heed. Kim wrenched at the tin trumpet and something lifted with a click. He had evidently raised a lid. If there were a devil inside, now was its time for—he sniffed—thus did the sewing-machines of the bazar smell. He would clean that shaitan. He slipped off his jacket, and plunged it into the box’s mouth. Something long and round bent under the pressure, there was a whirr and the voice stopped—as voices must if you ram a thrice-doubled coat on to the wax cylinder and into the works of an expensive phonograph. Kim finished his slumbers with a serene mind.

In the morning he was aware of Lurgan Sahib looking down on him.

‘Oah!’ said Kim, firmly resolved to cling to his Sahib-dom. ‘There was a box in the night that gave me bad talk. So I stopped it. Was it your box?’

The man held out his hand.

‘Shake hands, O’Hara,’ he said. ‘Yes, it was my box. I keep such things because my friends the Rajahs like them. That one is broken, but it was cheap at the price. Yes, my friends the Kings are very fond of toys—and so am I sometimes.’

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Kim looked him over out of the corners of his eyes. He was a Sahib in that he wore Sahib's clothes; the accent of his Urdu, the intonation of his English, showed that he was anything but a Sahib. He seemed to understand what moved in Kim's mind ere the boy opened his mouth, and he took no pains to explain himself as did Father Victor or the Lucknow masters. Sweetest of all—he treated Kim as an equal on the Asiatic side.

'I am sorry you cannot beat my boy this morning. He says he will kill you with a knife or poison. He is jealous, so I have put him in the corner and I shall not speak to him to-day. He has just tried to kill me. You must help me with the breakfast. He is almost too jealous to trust, just now.'

Now a genuine imported Sahib from England would have made a great to do over this tale. Lurgan Sahib stated it as simply as Mahbub Ali was used to record his little affairs in the North.

The back veranda of the shop was built out over the sheer hillside, and they looked down into their neighbours' chimney-pots, as is the custom of Simla. But even more than the purely Persian meal cooked by Lurgan Sahib with his own hands, the shop fascinated Kim. The Lahore Museum was larger, but here were more wonders—ghost-daggers and prayer-wheels from Tibet; turquoise and raw amber necklaces; green jade bangles; curiously packed incense-sticks in jars crusted over with raw garnets; the devil-masks of overnight and a wall of peacock-blue draperies; gilt figures of Buddha, and little portable lacquer altars; Russian samovars with turquoises on the lid; egg-shell china sets in quaint octagonal cane boxes; yellow ivory crucifixes—from Japan of all places in the world, so Lurgan Sahib said;

KIM

carpets in dusty bales, smelling atrociously, pushed back behind torn and rotten screens of geometrical work; Persian water-jugs for the hands after meals; dull copper incense-burners neither Chinese nor Persian, with friezes of fantastic devils running round them; tarnished silver belts that knotted like raw hide; hairpins of jade, ivory, and plasma; arms of all sorts and kinds, and a thousand other oddments were cased, or piled, or merely thrown into the room, leaving a clear space only round the rickety deal table, where Lurgan Sahib worked.

'Those things are nothing,' said his host, following Kim's glance. 'I buy them because they are pretty, and sometimes I sell—if I like the buyer's look. My work is on the table—some of it.'

It blazed in the morning light—all red and blue and green flashes, picked out with the vicious blue-white spurt of a diamond here and there. Kim opened his eyes.

'Oh, they are quite well, those stones. It will not hurt them to take the sun. Besides, they are cheap. But with sick stones it is very different.' He piled Kim's plate anew. 'There is no one but me can doctor a sick pearl and re-blue turquoises. I grant you opals—any fool can cure an opal—but for a sick pearl there is only me. Suppose I were to die! Then there would be no one. . . . Oh no! You cannot do anything with jewels. It will be quite enough if you understand a little about the Turquoise—some day.'

He moved to the end of the veranda to refill the heavy, porous clay water-jug from the filter.

'Do you want drink?'

Kim nodded. Lurgan Sahib, fifteen feet off, laid one hand on the jar. Next instant, it stood at Kim's elbow,

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full to within half of inch of the brim—the white cloth only showing, by a small wrinkle, where it had slid into place.

‘Wah!’ said Kim in most utter amazement. ‘That is magic.’ Lurgan Sahib’s smile showed that the compliment had gone home.

‘Throw it back.’

‘It will break.’

‘I say, throw it back.’

Kim pitched it at random. It fell short and crashed into fifty pieces, while the water dripped through the rough veranda boarding.

‘I said it would break.’

‘All one. Look at it. Look at the largest piece.’

That lay with a sparkle of water in its curve, as it were a star on the floor. Kim looked intently; Lurgan Sahib laid one hand gently on the nape of the neck, stroked it twice or thrice, and whispered: ‘Look! It shall come to life again, piece by piece. First the big piece shall join itself to two others on the right and the left—on the right and the left. Look!’

To save his life, Kim could not have turned his head. The light touch held him as in a vise, and his blood tingled pleasantly through him. There was one large piece of the jar where there had been three, and above them the shadowy outline of the entire vessel. He could see the veranda through it, but it was thickening and darkening with each beat of his pulse. Yet the jar—how slowly the thoughts came!—the jar had been smashed before his eyes. Another wave of prickling fire raced down his neck, as Lurgan Sahib moved his hand.

‘Look! It is coming into shape,’ said Lurgan Sahib.

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So far Kim had been thinking in Hindi, but a tremor came on him, and with an effort like that of a swimmer before sharks, who hurls himself half out of the water, his mind leaped up from a darkness that was swallowing it and took refuge in—the multiplication-table in English!

‘Look! It is coming into shape,’ whispered Lurgan Sahib.

The jar had been smashed—yess, smashed—not the native word, he would not think of that—but smashed—into fifty pieces, and twice three was six, and thrice three was nine, and four times three was twelve. He clung desperately to the repetition. The shadow-outline of the jar cleared like a mist after rubbing eyes. There were the broken shards; there was the spilt water drying in the sun, and through the cracks of the veranda showed, all ribbed, the white house-wall below—and thrice twelve was thirty-six!

‘Look! Is it coming into shape?’ asked Lurgan Sahib.

‘But it is smashed—smashed,’ he gasped—Lurgan Sahib had been muttering softly for the last half-minute. Kim wrenched his head aside. ‘Look! Dekho! It is there as it was there.’

‘It is there as it was there,’ said Lurgan, watching Kim closely while the boy rubbed his neck. ‘But you are the first of a many who have ever seen it so.’ He wiped his broad forehead.

‘Was that more magic?’ Kim asked suspiciously. The tingle had gone from his veins; he felt unusually wide awake.

‘No, that was not magic. It was only to see if there was—a flaw in a jewel. Sometimes very fine jewels will

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fly all to pieces if a man holds them in his hand, and knows the proper way. That is why one must be careful before one sets them. Tell me, did you see the shape of the pot?’

‘For a little time. It began to grow like a flower from the ground.’

‘And then what did you do? I mean, how did you think?’

‘Oah! I knew it was broken, and so, I think, that was what I thought—and it was broken.’

‘Hm! Has any one ever done that same sort of magic to you before?’

‘If it was,’ said Kim, ‘do you think I should let it again? I should run away.’

‘And now you are not afraid—eh?’

‘Not now.’

Lurgan Sahib looked at him more closely than ever. ‘I shall ask Mahbub Ali—not now, but some day later,’ he muttered. ‘I am pleased with you—yes; and I am pleased with you—no. You are the first that ever saved himself. I wish I knew what it was that . . . But you are right. You should not tell that—not even to me.’

He turned into the dusky gloom of the shop, and sat down at the table, rubbing his hands softly. A small, husky sob came from behind a pile of carpets. It was the Hindu child obediently facing towards the wall: his thin shoulders worked with grief.

‘Ah! He is jealous, so jealous. I wonder if he will try to poison me again in my breakfast, and make me cook it twice.’

‘Kubbee—kubbee nahin,’ came the broken answer.

‘And whether he will kill this other boy?’

KIM

‘Kubbee—kubbee nahin’ (never—never. No!).

‘What do you think he will do?’ He turned suddenly on Kim.

‘Oah! I do not know. Let him go, perhaps. Why did he want to poison you?’

‘Because he is so fond of me. Suppose you were fond of some one, and you saw some one come, and the man you were fond of was more pleased with him than he was with you, what would you do?’

Kim thought. Lurgan repeated the sentence slowly in the vernacular.

‘I should not poison that man,’ said Kim reflectively, ‘but I should beat that boy—if that boy was fond of my man. But first I would ask that boy if it were true.’

‘Ah! He thinks every one must be fond of me.’

‘Then I think he is a fool.’

‘Hearest thou?’ said Lurgan Sahib to the shaking shoulders. ‘The Sahib’s son thinks thou art a little fool. Come out, and next time thy heart is troubled, do not try white arsenic quite so openly. Surely the Devil Dasim was lord of our table-cloth that day! It might have made me ill, child, and then a stranger would have guarded the jewels. Come!’

The child, heavy-eyed with much weeping, crept out from behind the bale and flung himself passionately at Lurgan Sahib’s feet, with an extravagance of remorse that impressed even Kim.

‘I will look into the ink-pools—I will faithfully guard the jewels! Oh, my father and my mother, send him away!’ He indicated Kim with a backward jerk of his bare heel.

‘Not yet—not yet. In a little while he will go away again. But now he is at school—at a new madrissah—

and thou shalt be his teacher. Play the Play of the Jewels against him. I will keep tally.'

The child dried his tears at once, and dashed to the back of the shop, whence he returned with a copper tray.

'Give me!' he said to Lurgan Sahib. 'Let them come from thy hand, for he may say that I knew them before.'

'Gently—gently,' the man replied, and from a drawer under the table dealt a half handful of clattering trifles into the tray.

'Now,' said the child, waving an old newspaper. 'Look on them as long as thou wilt, stranger. Count and, if need be, handle. One look is enough for me.' He turned his back proudly.

'But what is the game?'

'When thou hast counted and handled and art sure that thou canst remember them all, I cover them with this paper, and thou must tell over the tally to Lurgan Sahib. I will write mine.'

'Oah!' The instinct of competition waked in his breast. He bent over the tray. There were but fifteen stones on it. 'That is easy,' he said after a minute. The child slipped the paper over the winking jewels and scribbled in a native account-book.

'There are under that paper five blue stones—one big, one smaller, and three small,' said Kim, all in haste. 'There are four green stones, and one with a hole in it; there is one yellow stone that I can see through, and one like a pipe-stem. There are two red stones, and—and—I made the count fifteen, but two I have forgotten. No! Give me time. One was of ivory, little and brownish; and—and—give me time . . . ?'

'One—two'—Lurgan Sahib counted him out up to ten. Kim shook his head.

KIM

‘Hear my count!’ the child burst in, trilling with laughter. ‘First, are two flawed sapphires—one of two ruttees and one of four as I should judge. The four-ruttee sapphire is chipped at the edge. There is one Turkestan turquoise, plain with black veins, and there are two inscribed—one with a Name of God in gilt, and the other being cracked across, for it came out of an old ring, I cannot read. We have now all five blue stones. Four flawed emeralds there are, but one is drilled in two places, and one is a little carven—’

‘Their weights?’ said Lurgan Sahib impassively.

‘Three—five—five—and four ruttees as I judge it. There is one piece of old greenish pipe amber, and a cut topaz from Europe. There is one ruby of Burma, of two ruttees, without a flaw, and there is a balas-ruby, flawed, of two ruttees. There is a carved ivory from China representing a rat sucking an egg; and there is last—ah ha!—a ball of crystal as big as a bean set in a gold leaf.’

He clapped his hands at the close.

‘He is thy master,’ said Lurgan Sahib, smiling.

‘Huh! He knew the names of the stones,’ said Kim, flushing. ‘Try again! With common things such as he and I both know.’

They heaped the tray again with odds and ends gathered from the shop, and even the kitchen, and every time the child won, till Kim marvelled.

‘Bind my eyes—let me feel once with my fingers, and even then I will leave thee open-eyed behind,’ he challenged.

Kim stamped with vexation when the lad made his boast good.

‘If it were men—or horses,’ he said, ‘I could do better.

KIM

This playing with tweezers and knives and scissors is too little.'

'Learn first—teach later,' said Lurgan Sahib. 'Is he thy master?'

'Truly. But how is it done?'

'By doing it many times over till it is done perfectly—for it is worth doing.'

The Hindu boy, in highest feather, actually patted Kim on the back.

'Do not despair,' he said. 'I myself will teach thee.'

'And I will see that thou art well taught,' said Lurgan Sahib, still speaking in the vernacular, 'for except my boy here—it was foolish of him to buy so much white arsenic when, if he had asked, I could have given it—except my boy here I have not in a long time met with one better worth teaching. And there are ten days more ere thou canst return to Lucknow where they teach nothing—at the long price. We shall, I think, be friends.'

They were a most mad ten days, but Kim enjoyed himself too much to reflect on their craziness. In the morning they played the Jewel Game—sometimes with veritable stones, sometimes with piles of swords and daggers, sometimes with photographs of natives. Through the afternoons he and the Hindu boy would mount guard in the shop, sitting dumb behind a carpet-bale or a screen and watching Mr. Lurgan's many and very curious visitors. There were small Rajahs, escorts coughing in the veranda, who came to buy curiosities—such as phonographs and mechanical toys. There were ladies in search of necklaces, and men, it seemed to Kim—but his mind may have been vitiated by early training—in search of the ladies; natives from indepen-

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dent and feudatory courts whose ostensible business was the repair of broken necklaces—rivers of light poured out upon the table—but whose true end seemed to be to raise money for angry Maharanees or young Rajahs. There were Babus to whom Lurgan Sahib talked with austerity and authority, but at the end of each interview he gave them money in coined silver and currency notes. There were occasional gatherings of long-coated theatrical natives who discussed metaphysics in English and Bengali, to Mr. Lurgan's great edification. He was always interested in religions. At the end of the day, Kim and the Hindu boy—whose name varied at Lurgan's pleasure—were expected to give a detailed account of all that they had seen and heard—their view of each man's character, as shown in his face, talk, and manner, and their notions of his real errand. After dinner, Lurgan Sahib's fancy turned more to what might be called dressing-up, in which game he took a most informing interest. He could paint faces to a marvel; with a brush-dab here and a line there changing them past recognition. The shop was full of all manner of dresses and turbans, and Kim was apparelled variously as a young Mohammedan of good family, an oilman, and once—which was a joyous evening—as the son of an Oudh landholder in the fullest of full dress. Lurgan Sahib had a hawk's eye to detect the least flaw in the make-up; and lying on a worn teak-wood couch, would explain by the half-hour together how such and such a caste talked, or walked, or coughed, or spat, or sneezed, and, since 'hows' matter little in this world, the 'why' of everything. The Hindu child played this game clumsily. That little mind, keen as an icicle where tally of jewels was concerned, could not temper itself to enter

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another's soul; but a demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses, and changed speech and gesture therewith.

Carried away by enthusiasm, he volunteered to show Lurgan Sahib one evening how the disciples of a certain caste of faquir, old Lahore acquaintances, begged doles by the roadside; and what sort of language he would use to an Englishman, to a Punjabi farmer going to a fair, and to a woman without a veil. Lurgan Sahib laughed immensely, and begged Kim to stay as he was, immobile for half an hour—cross-legged, ash-smeared, and wild-eyed, in the back room. At the end of that time entered a hulking, obese Babu whose stocking legs shook with fat, and Kim opened on him with a shower of wayside chaff. Lurgan Sahib—this annoyed Kim—watched the Babu and not the play.

'I think,' said the Babu heavily, lighting a cigarette, 'I am of opeenion that it is most extraordinary and effeecient performance. Except that you had told me I should have opined that—that—that you were pulling my legs. How soon can he become approximately effeecient chain-man? Because then I shall indent for him.'

'That is what he must learn at Lucknow.'

'Then order him to be jolly dam-quick. Good-night, Lurgan.' The Babu swung out with the gait of a bogged cow.

When they were telling over the day's list of visitors, Lurgan Sahib asked Kim who he thought the man might be.

'God knows!' said Kim cheerily. The tone might almost have deceived Mahbub Ali, but it failed entirely with the healer of sick pearls.

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‘That is true. God, He knows; but I wish to know what you think.’

Kim glanced sideways at his companion, whose eye had a way of compelling truth.

‘I—I think he will want me when I come from the school, but’—confidentially, as Lurgan Sahib nodded approval—‘I do not understand how he can wear many dresses and talk many tongues.’

‘Thou wilt understand many things later. He is a writer of tales for a certain Colonel. His honour is great only in Simla, and it is noticeable that he has no name, but only a number and a letter—that is a custom among us.’

‘And is there a price upon his head too—as upon Mah—all the others?’

‘Not yet; but if a boy rose up who is now sitting here and went—look, the door is open!—as far as a certain house with a red-painted veranda, behind that which was the old theatre in the Lower Bazar, and whispered through the shutters: “Hurree Chunder Mookerjee bore the bad news of last month,” that boy might take away a belt full of rupees.’

‘How many?’ said Kim promptly.

‘Five hundred—a thousand—as many as he might ask for.’

‘Good. And how long might such a boy live after the news was told?’ He smiled merrily at Lurgan Sahib’s very beard.

‘Ah! That is to be well thought of. Perhaps if he were very clever, he might live out the day—but not the night. By no means the night.’

‘Then what is the Babu’s pay if so much is put upon his head?’

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‘Eighty—perhaps a hundred—perhaps a hundred and fifty rupees; but the pay is the least part of the work. From time to time, God causes men to be born—and thou art one of them—who have a lust to go abroad at the risk of their lives and discover news—to-day it may be of far-off things, to-morrow of some hidden mountain, and the next day of some near-by men who have done a foolishness against the State. These souls are very few; and of these few, not more than ten are of the best. Among these ten I count the Babu, and that is curious. How great therefore and desirable must be a business that brazens the heart of a Bengali!’

‘True. But the days go slowly for me. I am yet a boy, and it is only within two months I learned to write Angrezi. Even now I cannot read it well. And there are yet years and years and long years before I can be even a chain-man.’

‘Have patience, Friend of all the World’—Kim started at the title. ‘Would I had a few of the years that so irk thee. I have proved thee in several small ways. This will not be forgotten when I make my report to the Colonel Sahib.’ Then, changing suddenly into English with a deep laugh:—

‘By Jove! O’Hara, I think there is a great deal in you; but you must not become proud and you must not talk. You must go back to Lucknow and be a good little boy and mind your book, as the English say, and perhaps, next holidays if you care, you can come back to me!’ Kim’s face fell. ‘Oh, I mean if you like. I know where you want to go.’

Four days later a seat was booked for Kim and his small trunk at the rear of a Kalka tonga. His companion was the whale-like Babu, who, with a fringed shawl

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wrapped round his head, and his fat openwork-stockinged left leg tucked under him, shivered and grunted in the morning chill.

'How comes it that this man is one of us?' thought Kim, considering the jelly-back as they jolted down the road; and the reflection threw him into most pleasant day-dreams. Lurgan Sahib had given him five rupees—a splendid sum—as well as the assurance of his protection if he worked. Unlike Mahbub, Lurgan Sahib had spoken most explicitly of the reward that would follow obedience, and Kim was content. If only, like the Babu, he could enjoy the dignity of a letter and a number—and a price upon his head! Some day he would be all that and more. Some day he might be almost as great as Mahbub Ali! The housetops of his search should be half India; he would follow Kings and ministers, as in the old days he had followed vakils and lawyers' touts across Lahore city for Mahbub Ali's sake. Meantime, there was the present, and not at all unpleasant, fact of St. Xavier's immediately before him. There would be new boys to condescend to, and there would be tales of holiday adventures to hear. Young Martin, son of the tea-planter at Manipur, had boasted that he would go to war, with a rifle, against the head-hunters. That might be, but it was certain young Martin had not been blown half across the forecourt of a Patiala palace by an explosion of fireworks; nor had he. . . . Kim fell to telling himself the story of his own adventures through the last three months. He could paralyse St. Xavier's—even the biggest boys who shaved—with the recital, were that permitted. But it was, of course, out of the question. There would be a price upon his head in good time, as Lurgan Sahib had

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assured him; and if he talked foolishly now, not only would that price never be set, but Colonel Creighton would cast him off—and he would be left to the wrath of Lurgan Sahib and Mahbub Ali—for the short space of life that would remain to him.

‘So I should lose Delhi for the sake of a fish,’ was his proverbial philosophy. It behoved him to forget his holidays (there would always remain the fun of inventing imaginary adventures) and, as Lurgan Sahib had said, to work.

Of all the boys hurrying back to St. Xavier’s, from Sukkur in the sands to Galle beneath the palms, none was so filled with virtue as Kimball O’Hara, jiggetting down to Umballa behind Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, whose name on the books of one section of the Ethnological Survey was R.17.

And if additional spur were needed, the Babu supplied it. After a huge meal at Kalka, he spoke uninteruptedly. Was Kim going to school? Then he, an M. A. of Calcutta University, would explain the advantages of education. There were marks to be gained by due attention to Latin and Wordsworth’s ‘Excursion’ (all this was Greek to Kim). French, too, was vital, and the best was to be picked up in Chandernagore, a few miles from Calcutta. Also a man might go far, as he himself had done, by strict attention to plays called ‘Lear’ and ‘Julius Cæsar,’ both much in demand by examiners. ‘Lear’ was not so full of historical allusions as ‘Julius Cæsar’; the book cost four annas, but could be bought second-hand in Bow Bazar for two. Still more important than Wordsworth, or the eminent authors, Burke and Hare, was the art and science of mensuration. A boy who had passed his examination

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in these branches—for which, by the way, there were no cram-books—could, by merely marching over a country with a compass and a level and a straight eye, carry away a picture of that country which might be sold for large sums in coined silver. But as it was occasionally inexpedient to carry about measuring-chains, a boy would do well to know the precise length of his own foot-pace, so that when he was deprived of what Hurree Chunder called ‘adventitious aids’ he might still tread his distances. To keep count of thousands of paces, Hurree Chunder’s experience had shown him nothing more valuable than a rosary of eighty-one or a hundred and eight beads, for ‘it was divisible and sub-divisible into many multiples and sub-multiples.’ Through the volleying drifts of English, Kim caught the general trend of the talk, and it interested him very much. Here was a new craft that a man could tuck away in his head; and by the look of the large wide world unfolding itself before him, it seemed that the more a man knew the better for him.

Said the Babu when he had talked for an hour and a half, ‘I hope some day to enjoy your offeicial acquaintance. Ad interim, if I may be pardoned that expression, I shall give you this betel-box which is highly valuable article and cost me two rupees only four years ago.’ It was a cheap, heart-shaped brass thing with three compartments for carrying the eternal betel-nut, lime and pan-leaf; but it was filled with little tabloid-bottles. ‘That is reward of merit for your performance in character of that holy man. You see, you are so young you think you will last for ever and not take care of your body. It is great nuisance to go sick in the middle of business. I am fond of drugs myself, and

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they are handy to cure poor people too. These are good departmental drugs—quinine and so on. I give it you for souvenir. Now good-bye. I have urgent private business here by the roadside.'

He slipped out noiselessly as a cat, on the Umballa road, hailed a passing ekka and jingled away, while Kim, tongue-tied, twiddled the brass betel-box in his hands.

The record of a boy's education interests few save his parents, and, as you know, Kim was an orphan. It is written in the books of St. Xavier in Partibus that a report of Kim's progress was forwarded at the end of each term to Colonel Creighton and to Father Victor, from whose hands duly came the money for his schooling. It is further recorded in the same books that he showed a great aptitude for mathematical studies as well as map-making, and carried away a prize ('The Life of Lord Lawrence,' tree-calf, two vols., nine rupees, eight annas) for proficiency therein; and the same term played in St. Xavier's eleven against the Allyghur Moham-medan College, his age being fourteen years and ten months. He was also re-vaccinated (from which we may assume that there had been another epidemic of small-pox at Lucknow) about the same time. Pencil notes on the edge of an old muster-roll record that he was punished several times for 'conversing with im-proper persons,' and it seems that he was once sen-tenced to heavy pains for 'absenting himself for a day in the company of a street beggar.' That was when he got over the gate and pleaded with the lama through a whole day down the banks of the Goomtee to accom-pany him on the Road next holidays—for one month—

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for a little week; and the lama set his face as a flint against it, averring that the time had not yet come. Kim's business, said the old man as they ate cakes together, was to get all the wisdom of the Sahibs and then he would see. The hand of friendship must in some way have averted the whip of calamity, for six weeks later Kim seems to have passed an examination in elementary surveying 'with great credit,' his age being fifteen years and eight months. From this date the record is silent. His name does not appear in the year's batch of those who entered for the subordinate Survey of India, but against it stand the words 'removed on appointment.'

Several times in those three years, cast up at the Temple of the Tirthankers in Benares the lama, a little thinner and a shade yellower, if that were possible, but gentle and untainted as ever. Sometimes it was from the South that he came—from south of Tuticorin, whence the wonderful fire-boats go to Ceylon where are priests who know Pali; sometimes it was from the wet green West and the thousand cotton-factory chimneys that ring Bombay; and once from the North, where he had doubled back eight hundred miles to talk a day with the Keeper of the Images in the Wonder House. He would stride to his cell in the cool, cut marble—the priests of the temple were good to the old man—wash off the dust of travel, make prayer, and depart for Lucknow, well accustomed now to the ways of the rail, in a third-class carriage. Returning, it was noticeable, as his friend the Seeker pointed out to the head-priest, that he ceased for a while to mourn the loss of his River, or to draw wondrous pictures of the Wheel of Life, but preferred to talk of the beauty and wisdom of a certain

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mysterious chela whom no man of the temple had ever seen. Yes, he had followed the traces of the Blessed Feet throughout all India. (The curator has still in his possession a most marvellous account of his wanderings and meditations.) There remained nothing more in life but to find the River of the Arrow. Yet it was shown to him in dreams that it was a matter not to be undertaken with any hope of success unless that seeker had with him the one chela appointed to bring the event to a happy issue, and versed in great wisdom—such wisdom as white-haired Keepers of Images possess. For example (here came out the snuff-gourd, and the kindly Jain priests made haste to be silent):—

‘Long and long ago, when Devadatta was King of Benares—let all listen to the “Jataka”!—an elephant was captured for a time by the king’s hunters and, ere he broke free, beringed with a grievous leg-iron. This he strove to remove with hate and frenzy in his heart, and hurrying up and down the forests, besought his brother-elephants to wrench it asunder. One by one, with their strong trunks, they tried and failed. At the last they gave it as their opinion that the ring was not to be broken by any bestial power. And in a thicket, new-born, wet with the moisture of birth, lay a day-old calf of the herd whose mother had died. The fettered elephant, forgetting his own agony, said: “If I do not help this suckling it will perish under our feet.” So he stood above the young thing, making his legs buttresses against the uneasily moving herd; and he begged milk of a virtuous cow, and the calf throve, and the ringed elephant was the calf’s guide and defence. Now the days of an elephant—let all listen to the “Jataka”!—are thirty-five years to his full strength, and through

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thirty-five Rains the ringed elephant befriended the younger, and all the while the fetter ate into the flesh.

“Then one day the young elephant saw the half-buried iron, and turning to the elder said: “What is this?” “It is even my sorrow,” said he who had befriended him. Then that other put out his trunk and in the twinkling of an eyelash abolished the ring, saying: “The appointed time has come.” So the virtuous elephant who had waited temperately and done kind acts was relieved, at the appointed time, by the very calf whom he had turned aside to cherish—let all listen to the “Jataka”!—for the Elephant was Ananda, and the Calf that broke the ring was none other than The Lord Himself. . . .”

Then he would shake his head benignly, and over the ever-clicking rosary point out how free that elephant calf was from the sin of pride. He was as humble as a chela who, seeing his master sitting in the dust outside the Gates of Learning, overleapt the gates (though they were locked) and took his master to his heart in the presence of the proud-stomached city. Rich would be the reward of such a master and such a chela when the time came for them to seek freedom together!

So did the lama speak, coming and going across India as softly as a bat. A sharp-tongued old woman in a house among the fruit-trees behind Saharunpore honoured him as the woman honoured the prophet, but his chamber was by no means upon the wall. In an apartment of the forecourt overlooked by cooing doves he would sit, while she laid aside her useless veil and chattered of spirits and fiends of Kulu, of grandchildren unborn, and of the free-tongued brat who had talked to her in the resting-place. Once, too, he strayed alone

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from the Grand Trunk Road below Umballa to the very village whose priest had tried to drug him; but the kind heaven that guards lamas sent him at twilight through the crops, absorbed and unsuspecting, to the ressaldar's door. Here was like to have been a grave misunderstanding, for the old soldier asked him why the Friend of the Stars had gone that way only six days before.

'That may not be,' said the lama. 'He has gone back to his own people.'

'He sat in that corner telling a hundred merry tales five nights ago,' his host insisted. 'True, he vanished somewhat suddenly in the dawn after foolish talk with my grand-daughter. He grows apace, but he is the same Friend of the Stars as brought me true word of the war. Have ye parted?'

'Yes—and No,' the lama replied. 'We—we have not altogether parted, but the time is not ripe that we should take the Road together. He acquires wisdom in another place. We must wait.'

'All one—but if it were not the boy how did he come to speak so continually of thee?'

'And what said he?' asked the lama eagerly.

'Sweet words—an hundred thousand—that thou art his father and mother and such all. Pity that he does not take the Queen's service. He is fearless.'

This news amazed the lama, who did not then know how religiously Kim kept to the contract made with Mahbub Ali, and perforce ratified by Colonel Creighton. . . .

'There is no holding the young pony from the game,' said the horse-dealer when the Colonel pointed out that vagabonding over India in holiday time was absurd.

KIM

'If permission be refused to go and come as he chooses, he will make light of the refusal. Then who is to catch him? Colonel Sahib, only once in a thousand years is a horse born so well fitted for the game as this our colt. And we need men.'

CHAPTER X

Your tiercel's too long at hack, Sire. He's no eyass
But a passage-hawk that footed ere we caught him,
Dangerously free o' the air. Faith! were he mine
(As mine's the glove he binds to for his tirings)
I'd fly him with a make-hawk. He's in yarak
Plumed to the very point—so manned so weath-
ered . . .

Give him the firmament God made him for,
And what shall take the air of him? —Old Play.

LURGAN SAHIB did not use as direct speech, but his advice tallied with Mahbub's; and the upshot was good for Kim. He knew better now than to leave Lucknow city in native garb, and if Mahbub were anywhere within reach of a letter, it was to Mahbub's camp he headed, and made his change under the Pathan's wary eye. Could the little Survey paint-box that he used for map-tinting in term-time have found a tongue to tell of holiday doings, he might have been expelled. Once Mahbub and he went together as far as the beautiful city of Bombay, with three truck-loads of tram-horses, and Mahbub nearly melted when Kim proposed a sail in a dhow across the Indian Ocean to buy Gulf Arabs, which he understood from a hanger-on of the dealer Abdul Rahman, fetched better prices than mere Cabulis.

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He dipped his hand into the dish with that great trader when Mahbub and a few co-religionists were invited to a big Haj dinner. They came back by way of Karachi by sea, when Kim took his first experience of sea-sickness sitting on the fore-hatch of a coasting-steamer, well persuaded he had been poisoned. The Babu's famous drug-box proved useless, though Kim had restocked it at Bombay. Mahbub had business at Quetta, and there Kim, as Mahbub admitted, earned his keep, and perhaps a little over, by spending four curious days as scullion in the house of a fat Commissariat sergeant, from whose office-box, in an auspicious moment, he removed a little vellum ledger which he copied out—it seemed to deal entirely with cattle and camel sales—by moonlight, lying behind an outhouse, all through one hot night. Then he returned the ledger to its place, and, at Mahbub's word, left that service unpaid, rejoining him six miles down the road, the clean copy in his bosom.

'That soldier is a small fish,' Mahbub Ali explained, 'but in time we shall catch the larger one. He only sells oxen at two prices—one for himself and one for the Government—which I do not think is a sin.'

'Why could not I take away the little book and be done with it?'

'Then he would have been frightened, and he would have told his master. Then we should miss, perhaps, a great number of new rifles which seek their way up from Quetta to the North. The Game is so large that one sees but a little at a time.'

'Oho!' said Kim, and held his tongue. That was in the monsoon holidays, after he had taken the prize for mathematics. The Christmas holidays he spent—

deducting ten days for private amusements—with Lurgan Sahib, where he sat for the most part in front of a roaring wood-fire—Jakko-road was four feet deep in snow that year—and—the small Hindu had gone away to be married—helped Lurgan to thread pearls. He made Kim learn whole chapters of the Koran by heart, till he could deliver them with the very roll and cadence of a mullah. Moreover, he told Kim the names and properties of many native drugs, as well as the runes proper to recite when you administer them. And in the evenings he wrote charms on parchment—elaborate pentagrams crowned with the names of devils—Murra, and Awan the Companion of Kings—all fantastically written in the corners. More to the point, he advised Kim as to the care of his own body, the cure of fever-fits, and simple remedies of the Road. A week before it was time to go down, Colonel Creighton Sahib—this was unfair—sent Kim a written examination-paper that concerned itself solely with rods and chains and links and angles.

Next holidays he was out with Mahbub, and here, by the way, he nearly died of thirst, plodding through the sand on a camel to the mysterious city of Bikaneer, where the wells are four hundred feet deep, and lined throughout with camel-bone. It was not an amusing trip from Kim's point of view, because—in defiance of the contract—the Colonel ordered him to make a map of that wild, walled city; and since Mohammedan horse-boys and pipe-tenders are not expected to drag Survey-chains round the capital of an independent native state, Kim was forced to pace all his distances by means of a bead rosary. He used the compass for bearings as occasion served—after dark chiefly, when the camels had

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been fed—and by the help of his little Survey paint-box of six colour-cakes and three brushes, he achieved something not remotely unlike the city of Jeysalmir. Mahbub laughed a great deal, and advised him to make up a written report as well; and in the back of the big account-book that lay under the flap of Mahbub's pet saddle Kim fell to work.

'It must hold everything that thou hast seen or touched or considered. Write as though the Jung-i-Lat Sahib himself had come by stealth with a vast army outsetting to war.'

'How great an army?'

'Oh, half a lakh of men.'

'Folly! Remember how few and bad were the wells in the sand. Not a thousand thirsty men could come near by here.'

'Then write that down—also all the old breaches in the walls—and whence the firewood is cut—and what is the temper and disposition of the King. I stay here till all my horses are sold. I will hire a room by the gateway, and thou shalt be my accountant. There is a good lock to the door.'

The report in its unmistakable St. Xavier's running script, and the brown, yellow, and lake-daubed map, was on hand a few years ago (a careless clerk filed it with the rough notes of E.23's second Seistan survey), but by now the pencil characters must be almost illegible. Kim translated it, sweating under the light of an oil-lamp, to Mahbub, the second day of their return-journey. The Pathan rose and stooped over his dappled saddle-bags.

'I knew it would be worthy a dress of honour, and so I made one ready,' he said smiling. 'Were I Amir of

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Afghanistan (and some day we may see him), I would fill thy mouth with gold.' He laid the garments formally at Kim's feet. There was a gold-embroidered Peshawur turban-cap, rising to a cone, and a big turban-cloth ending in a broad fringe of gold. There was a Delhi embroidered waistcoat to slip over a milky-white shirt, fastening to the right, ample and flowing; green pyjamas with twisted silk waist-string; and that nothing might be lacking, russia-leather slippers, smelling divinely, with arrogantly curled tips.

'Upon a Wednesday, and in the morning, to put on new clothes is auspicious,' said Mahbub solemnly. 'But we must not forget the wicked folk in the world. So!'

He capped all the splendour, that was taking Kim's delighted breath away, with a mother-of-pearl, nickel-plated, self-extracting .450 revolver.

'I had thought of a smaller bore, but reflected that this takes Government bullets. A man can always come by those—especially across the Border. Stand up and let me look.' He clapped Kim on the shoulder. 'May you never be tired, Pathan! Oh, the hearts to be broken! Oh, the eyes under the eyelashes, looking sideways!'

Kim turned about, pointed his toes, stretched, and felt mechanically for the moustache that was just beginning. Then he stooped towards Mahbub's feet to make proper acknowledgment with fluttering, quick-patting hands; his heart too full for words. Mahbub forestalled and embraced him.

'My son,' said he, 'what need of words between us? But is not the little gun a delight? All six cartridges come out at one twist. It is borne in the bosom next

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the skin, which, as it were, keeps it oiled. Never put it elsewhere, and please God, thou shalt some day kill a man with it.'

'Hai mai!' said Kim ruefully. 'If a Sahib kills a man he is hung in the jail.'

'True: but one pace beyond the Border, men are wiser. Put it away; but fill it first. Of what use is a gun unfed?'

'When I go back to the madrissah I must return it. They do not allow little guns. Thou wilt keep it for me?'

'Son, I am wearied of that madrissah, where they take the best years of a man to teach him what he can only learn upon the Road. The folly of the Sahibs has neither top nor bottom. No matter. Maybe thy written report shall save thee further bondage; and God He knows we need men more and more in the Game.'

They marched, jaw-bound against blowing sand, across the salt desert to Jodhpore, where Mahbub and his handsome nephew Habib-Ullah did much trading; and then sorrowfully, in European clothes, which he was fast outgrowing, Kim went second-class to St. Xavier's. Three weeks later, Colonel Creighton, pricing Tibetan ghost-daggers at Lurgan's shop, faced Mahbub Ali openly mutinous. Lurgan Sahib operated as support in reserve.

'The pony is made—finished—mouthing and paced, Sahib! From now on, day by day, he will lose his manners if he is kept at tricks. Drop the rein on his back and let go,' said the horse-dealer. 'We need him.'

'But he is so young, Mahbub—not more than sixteen—is he?'

'When I was fifteen, I had shot my man and begot my man, Sahib.'

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‘You impenitent old heathen.’ Creighton turned to Lurgan. The black beard nodded assent to the wisdom of the Afghan’s dyed scarlet.

‘I should have used him long ago,’ said Lurgan. ‘The younger the better. That is why I always have my really valuable jewels watched by a child. You sent him to me to try. I tried him in every way: he is the only boy I could not make to see things.’

‘In the crystal—in the ink-pool?’ demanded Mahbub.

‘No. Under my hand, as I told you. That has never happened before. It means that he is strong enough—but you think it skittles, Colonel Creighton—to make any one do anything he wants. And that is three years ago. I have taught him a good deal since, Colonel Creighton. I think you waste him now.’

‘Hmm! Maybe you’re right. But, as you know, there is no Survey work for him at present.’

‘Let him out—let him go,’ Mahbub interrupted. ‘Who expects any colt to carry heavy weight at first? Let him run with the caravans like our white camel-colts—for luck. I would take him myself, but—’

‘There is a little business where he would be most useful—in the South,’ said Lurgan, with peculiar suavity, dropping his heavy blued eyelids.

‘E.23 has that in hand,’ said Creighton quickly. ‘He must not go down there. Besides, he knows no Turki.’

‘Only tell him the shape and the smell of the letters we want and he will bring them back,’ Lurgan insisted.

‘No. That is a man’s job,’ said Creighton.

It was a wry-necked matter of unauthorised and incendiary correspondence between a person who claimed to be the ultimate authority in all matters of the

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Mohammedan religion throughout the world, and a younger member of a royal house who had been brought to book for kidnapping women within British territory. The Moslem Archbishop had been emphatic and over-arrogant; the young prince was merely sulky at the curtailment of his privileges, but there was no need he should continue a correspondence which might some day compromise him. One letter indeed had been procured, but the finder was later found dead by the roadside in the habit of an Arab trader, as E.23, taking up the work, duly reported.

These facts, and a few others not to be published, made both Mahbub and Creighton shake their heads.

'Let him go out with his Red Lama,' said the horse-dealer with visible effort. 'He is fond of the old man. He can learn his paces by the rosary at least.'

'I have had some dealings with the old man—by letter,' said Colonel Creighton, smiling to himself. 'Whither goes he?'

'Up and down the land, as he has these three years. He seeks a River of Healing. God's curse upon all—' Mahbub checked himself. 'He beds down at the Tein-ple of the Tirthankers or at Buddh Gaya when he is in from the Road. Then he goes to see the boy at the madrissah as we know, for the boy was punished for it twice or thrice. He is quite mad, but a peaceful man. I have met him. The Babu also has had dealings with him. We have watched him for three years. Red Lamas are not so common in Hind that one loses track.'

'Babus are very curious,' said Lurgan meditatively. 'Do you know what Hurree Babu really wants? He wants to be made a member of the Royal Society by taking ethnological notes. I tell you, I tell him about

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the lama everything that Mahbub and the boy have told me. Hurree Babu goes down to Benares—at his own expense, I think.'

'I don't,' said Creighton briefly. He had paid Hurree's travelling expenses, out of a most lively curiosity to learn what the lama might be.

'And he applies to the lama for information on lamaism, and devil dances, and spells and charms, several times in these few years. Holy Virgin! I could have told him all that yee-ars ago. I think Hurree Babu is getting too old for the Road. He likes better to collect manners and customs information. Yes, he wants to be an F. R. S.'

'Hurree thinks well of the boy, doesn't he?'

'Oh, very indeed—we have had some pleasant evenings at my little place—but I think it would be waste to throw him away with Hurree on the Ethnological side.'

'Not for a first experience. How does that strike you, Mahbub? Let the boy run with the lama for six months. After that we can see. He will get experience.'

'He has it already, Sahib—as a fish controls the water he swims in; but for every reason it will be well to loose him from the school.'

'Very good, then,' said Creighton, half to himself. 'He can go with the lama, and if Hurree Babu cares to keep an eye on them so much the better. He won't lead the boy into any danger as Mahbub would. Curious—his wish to be an F. R. S. Very human, too. He is best on the Ethnological side—Hurree.'

No money and no preferment would have drawn Creighton from his work on the Indian Survey, but deep in his heart also lay the ambition to write 'F. R. S.'

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after his name. Honours of a sort he knew could be obtained by ingenuity and the help of friends, but, to the best of his belief, nothing save work—papers representing a life of it—took a man into the Society which he had bombarded for years with monographs on strange Asiatic cults and unknown customs. Nine men out of ten would flee from a Royal Society soiree in extremity of boredom; but Creighton was the tenth, and at times his soul yearned for the crowded rooms in easy London where silver-haired, bald-headed gentlemen who know nothing of the Army move among spectroscopic experiments, the lesser plants of the frozen tundras, electric flight-measuring machines, and apparatus for slicing into fractional millimetres the left eye of the female mosquito. By all right and reason, it was the Royal Geographical that should have appealed to him, but men are as chancy as children in their choice of playthings. So Creighton smiled, and thought the better of Hurree Babu, moved by like desires.

He dropped the ghost-dagger and looked up at Mahbub.

‘How soon can we get the colt from the stable?’ said the horse-dealer, reading his eyes.

‘Hmm. If I withdraw him by order now—what will he do, think you? I have never before assisted at the teaching of such an one.’

‘He will come to me,’ said Mahbub promptly. ‘Lurgan Sahib and I will prepare him for the Road.’

‘So be it, then. For six months he shall run at his choice: but who will be his sponsor?’

Lurgan slightly inclined his head. ‘He will not tell anything, if that is what you are afraid of, Colonel Creighton.’

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‘It’s only a boy, after all.’

‘Ye-es; but first, he has nothing to tell; and secondly, he knows what would happen. Also, he is very fond of Mahbub, and of me a little.’

‘Will he draw pay?’ demanded the practical horse-dealer.

‘Food and water allowance only. Twenty rupees a month.’

One advantage of the Secret Service is that it has no worrying audit. The service is ludicrously starved, of course, but the funds are administered by a few men who do not call for vouchers or present itemised accounts. Mahbub’s eyes lighted with almost a Sikh’s love of money. Even Lurgan’s impassive face changed. He considered the years to come when Kim would have been entered and made to the Great Game that never ceases day and night, throughout India. He foresaw honour and credit in the mouths of a chosen few, coming to him from his pupil. Lurgan Sahib had made E.23 what E.23 was, out of a bewildered, impertinent, lying, little North-West Province man.

But the joy of these masters was pale and smoky beside the joy of Kim when St. Xavier’s Head called him aside, with word that Colonel Creighton had sent for him.

‘I understand, O’Hara, that he has found you a place as an assistant chain-man in the Canal Department: that comes of taking up mathematics. It is great luck for you, for you are only seventeen; but of course you understand that you do not become pukka (permanent) till you have passed the autumn examination. So you must not think you are going out into the world to enjoy yourself, or that your fortune is made. There is a great

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deal of hard work before you. Only, if you succeed in becoming pukka, you can rise, you know, to four hundred and fifty a month.' Whereat the Principal gave him much good advice as to his conduct, and his manners, and his morals; and others, his elders, who had not been wafted into billets, talked, as only Anglo-Indian lads can, of favouritism and corruption. Indeed, young Cazalet, whose father was a pensioner at Chunar, hinted very broadly that Colonel Creighton's interest in Kim was directly paternal; and Kim, instead of retaliating, did not even use language. He was thinking of the immense fun to come, of Mahbub's letter of the day before, all neatly written in English, making appointment for that afternoon in a house the very name of which would have crisped the Principal's hair with horror. . . .

Said Kim to Mahbub in Lucknow railway station that evening, above the luggage-scales—'I feared lest, at the last, the roof would fall upon me and cheat me. Is it indeed all finished, O my father?'

Mahbub snapped his fingers to show the utterness of that end, and his eyes blazed like red coals.

'Then where is the pistol that I may wear it?'

'Softly! A half-year, to run without heel-ropes. I begged that much from Colonel Creighton Sahib. At twenty rupees a month. Old Red Hat knows that thou art coming.'

'I will pay thee dustoorie (commission) on my pay for three months,' said Kim gravely. 'Yea, two rupees a month. But first we must get rid of these.' He plucked his thin linen trousers and dragged at his collar. 'I have brought with me all that I need on the Road. My trunk has gone up to Lurgan Sahib's.'

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‘Who sends his salaams to thee—Sahib?’

‘Lurgan Sahib is a very clever man. But what dost thou do?’

‘I go North again, upon the Great Game. What else? Is thy mind still set on following old Red Hat?’

‘Do not forget he made me that I am—though he did not know it. Year by year, he sent the money that taught me.’

‘I would have done as much—had it struck my thick head,’ Mahbub growled. ‘Come away. The lamps are lit now, and none will mark thee in the bazar. We go to Huneefa’s house.’

On the way thither, Mahbub gave him much the same sort of advice as his mother gave to Lemuel, and curiously enough, Mahbub was exact to point out how Huneefa and her likes destroyed kings.

‘And I remember,’ he quoted maliciously, ‘one who said, “Trust a snake before a harlot and a harlot before a Pathan, Mahbub Ali.”’ Now, excepting as to Pathans, of whom I am one, all that is true. Most true is it in the Great Game, for it is by means of woman that all plans come to ruin and we lie out in dawning with our throats cut. So it happened to such a one,—he gave the reddest particulars.

‘Then why—?’ Kim paused before a filthy staircase that climbed to the warm darkness of an upper chamber in the ward that is behind Azim Ullah’s tobacco-shop. Those who know it call it The Bird-cage—it is so full of whisperings and whistlings and chirrupings.

The room, with its dirty cushions and half-smoked hookahs, smelt abominably of stale tobacco. In one corner lay a huge and shapeless woman clad in greenish gauzes, and decked, brow, nose, ear, neck, wrist, arm,

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waist, and ankle, with heavy native jewellery. When she turned it was like the clashing of copper pots. A lean cat in the balcony outside the window mewed hungrily. Kim checked, bewildered, at the door-curtain.

'Is that the new stuff, Mahbub?' said Huneefa lazily, scarce troubling to remove the mouthpiece from her lips. 'O Buktanoos!'—like most of her kind, she swore by the Djinns—'O Buktanoos! He is very good to look upon.'

'That is part of the selling of the horse,' Mahbub explained to Kim, who laughed.

'I have heard that talk since my Sixth Day,' he replied, squatting by the light. 'Whither does it lead?'

'To protection. To-night we change thy colour. This sleeping under roofs has blanched thee like an almond. But Huneefa has the secret of a colour that catches. No painting of a day or two. Also, we fortify thee against the chances of the Road. That is my gift to thee, my son. Take out all metals on thee and lay them here. Make ready, Huneefa.'

Kim dragged forth his compass, Survey paint-box, and the new-filled medicine-box. They had all accompanied his travels, and boy-like he valued them immensely.

The woman rose slowly and moved with her hands a little spread before her. Then Kim saw that she was blind. 'No, no,' she muttered, 'the Pathan speaks truth—my colour does not go in a week or a month, and those whom I protect are under strong guard.'

'When one is far off and alone, it would not be well to grow blotched and leprous of a sudden,' said Mahbub. 'When thou wast with me I could oversee the matter. Besides, a Pathan is a fair-skin. Strip to the waist now and look how thou art whitened.' Huneefa felt her way

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back from an inner room. ‘It is no matter, she cannot see.’ He took a pewter bowl from her ringed hand.

The dye-stuff showed blue and gummy. Kim experimented on the back of his wrist, with a dab of cotton wool; but Huneefa heard him.

‘No, no,’ she cried, ‘the thing is not done thus, but with the proper ceremonies. The colouring is the least part. I give thee the full protection of the Road.’

‘Jadoo?’ (magic), said Kim, with a half start. He did not like the white, sightless eyes. Mahbub’s hand on his neck bowed him to the floor, nose within an inch of the boards.

‘Be still. No harm comes to thee, my son. I am thy sacrifice!’

He could not see what the woman was about, but heard the clish-clash of her jewellery for many minutes. A match lit up the darkness; he caught the well-known purr and fizz of grains of incense. Then the room filled with smoke—heavy, aromatic, and stupefying. Through growing drowse he heard the names of devils—of Zulbazan, Son of Eblis, who lives in bazars and paraos, making all the sudden lewd wickedness of wayside halts; of Dulhan, invisible about mosques, the dweller among the slippers of the Faithful, who hinders folk from their prayers; and Musboot, Lord of lies and panic. Huneefa, now whispering in his ear, now talking as from an immense distance, touched him with horrible soft fingers, but Mahbub’s grip never shifted from his neck till, relaxing with a sigh, the boy lost his senses.

‘Allah! How he fought! We should never have done it but for the drugs. That was his White blood, I take it,’ said Mahbub testily. ‘Go on with the dawut (invocation). Give him full Protection.’

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'O Hearer! Thou that hearest with ears, be present. Listen, O Hearer!' Huneefa moaned, her dead eyes turned to the west. The dark room filled with moanings and snortings.

From the outer balcony, a ponderous figure raised a round bullet head and coughed nervously.

'Do not interrupt this ventriloquial necromanciss, my friend,' it said in English. 'I opine that it is very disturbing to you, but no enlightened observer is jolly well upset.'

' . . . I will lay a plot for their ruin! O Prophet, bear with the unbelievers. Let them alone awhile!' Huneefa's face, turned to the northward, worked horribly, and it was as though voices from the ceiling answered her.

Hurree Babu returned to his note-book, balanced on the window-sill, but his hand shook. Huneefa, in some sort of drugged ecstasy, wrenched herself to and fro as she sat cross-legged by Kim's still head, and called upon devil after devil, in the ancient order of the ritual, binding them to avoid the boy's every action.

'With Him are the keys of the Secret Things! None knoweth them beside Himself. He knoweth that which is in the dry land and in the sea!' Again broke out the unearthly whistling responses.

'I—I apprehend it is not at all malignant in its operation?' said the Babu, watching the throat-muscles quiver and jerk as Huneefa spoke with tongues. 'It—it is not likely that she has killed the boy? If so, I decline to be witness at the trial. . . . What was the last hypothetical devil mentioned?'

'Babuji,' said Mahbub in the vernacular. 'I have no regard for the devils of Hind, but the Sons of Eblis

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are far otherwise, and whether they be jumalee (well-affected) or jullalee (terrible) they love not Kafirs.'

'Then you think I had better go?' said Hurree Babu, half rising. 'They are, of course, dematerialised phenomena. Spencer says—'

Huneefa's crisis passed, as these things must, in a paroxysm of howling, with a touch of froth at the lips. She lay spent and motionless beside Kim, and the crazy voices ceased.

'Wah! That work is done. May the boy be better for it; and Huneefa is surely a mistress of dawut. Help haul her aside, Babu. Do not be afraid.'

'How am I to fear the absolutely non-existent?' said Hurree Babu, talking English to reassure himself. It is an awful thing still to dread the magic that you contemptuously investigate—to collect folk-lore for the Royal Society with a lively belief in all Powers of Darkness.

Mahbub chuckled. He had been out with Hurree on the Road ere now. 'Let us finish the colouring,' said he. 'The boy is well protected if—if the Lords of the Air have ears to hear. I am a sufi (free-thinker), but when one can get blind-sides of a woman, a stallion, or a devil, why go round to invite a kick? Set him upon the way, Babu, and see that old Red Hat does not lead him beyond our reach. I must get back to my horses.'

'All raight,' said Hurree Babu. 'He is at present a curious spectacle.'

• • • • •
About third cock-crow, Kim woke after a sleep of thousands of years. Huneefa, in her corner, snored heavily, but Mahbub was gone.

'I hope you were not frightened,' said an oily voice at

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his elbow. ‘I superintended entire operation, which was most interesting from ethnological point of view. It was high-class dawut.’

‘Huh!’ said Kim, recognising Hurree Babu, who smiled ingratiatingly.

‘And also I had honour to bring down from Lurgan your present costume. I am not in the habit officially of carrying such gauds to subordinates, but’—he giggled—‘your case is noted as exceptional on the books. I hope Mr. Lurgan will note my action.’

Kim yawned and stretched himself. It was good to turn and twist within loose clothes once again.

‘What is this?’ He looked curiously at the heavy duffle-stuff loaded with the scents of the far North.

‘Oho! That is inconspicuous dress of chela attached to service of lamaistic lama. Com-plete in every par-ticular,’ said Hurree Babu, rolling into the balcony to clean his teeth at a goglet. ‘I am of opeenion it is not your old gentleman’s precise religion, but rather sub-variant of same. I have contributed rejected notes to “Asiatic Quarterly Review” on these subjects. Now it is curious that the old gentleman himself is totally devoid of religiosity. He is not a dam partic-u-lar.’

‘Do you know him?’

Hurree Babu held up his hand to show he was en-gaged in the prescribed rites that accompany tooth-cleaning and such things among decently bred Bengalis. Then he recited in English an Arya-Somaj prayer of a theistical nature, and stuffed his mouth with pan and betel.

‘Oah yes. I have met him several times at Benares, and also at Buddh Gaya, to interrogate him on religious

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points and devil-worship. He is pure agnostic—same as me.'

Huneefa stirred in her sleep, and Hurree Babu jumped nervously to the copper incense-burner, all black and discoloured in morning-light, rubbed a finger in the accumulated lampblack, and drew it diagonally across his face.

'Who has died in thy house?' asked Kim in the vernacular.

'None. But she may have the Evil Eye—that sorceress,' the Babu replied.

'What dost thou do now, then?'

'I will set thee on thy way to Benares, if thou goest thither, and tell thee what must be known by Us.'

'I go. At what hour runs the te-rain?' He rose to his feet, looked round the desolate chamber and at the yellow-wax face of Huneefa as the low sun stole across the floor. 'Is there money to be paid that witch?'

'No. She has charmed thee against all devils and all dangers—in the name of her devils. It was Mahbub's desire.' In English: 'He is highly obsolete, I think, to indulge in such superstition. Why, it is all ventrilo-quy. Belly-speak—eh?'

Kim snapped his fingers mechanically to avert whatever evil—Mahbub, he knew, meditated none—might have crept in through Huneefa's ministrations; and Hurree giggled once more. But as he crossed the room he was careful not to step in Huneefa's blotched, squat shadow on the boards. Witches—when their time is on them—can lay hold of the heels of a man's soul if he does that.

'Now you must well listen,' said the Babu when they were in the fresh air. 'Part of these ceremonies which

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we witnessed they include supply of effeecient amulet to those of our Department. If you feel in your neck you will find one small silver amulet, verree cheap. That is ours. Do you understand?

‘Oah yes, hawa-dilli’ (a heart-lifter), said Kim, feeling at his neck.

‘Huneefa she makes them for two rupees twelve annas with—oh, all sorts of exorcisms. They are quite common, except they are partially black enamel, and there is a paper inside each one full of names of local saints and such things. Thatt is Huneefa’s look-out, you see? Huneefa makes them onlee for us, but in case she does not, when we get them we put in, before issue, one small piece of turquoise. Mr. Lurgan, he gives them. There is no other source of supply; but it was me invented all this. It is strictly unoffeicial of course, but convenient for subordinates. Colonel Creighton he does not know. He is European. The turquoise is wrapped in the paper. . . . Yes, that is road to railway station. . . . Now suppose you go with the lama, or with me, I hope, some day, or with Mahbub. Suppose we get into a dam-tight place. I am a fearful man—most fearful—but I tell you I have been in dam-tight places more than hairs on my head. You say: “I am Son of the Charm.” Verree good.’

‘I do not understand quite. We must not be heard talking English here.’

‘That is all raight. I am only Babu showing off my English to you. All we Babus talk English to show off,’ said Hurree, flinging his shoulder-cloth jauntily. ‘As I was about to say, “Son of the Charm” means that you may be member of the Sat Bhai—the Seven Brothers, which is Hindi and Tantric. It is popularly supposed

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to be extinct society, but I have written notes to show it is still extant. You see it is all my invention. Verree good. Sat Bhai has many members, and perhaps before they jolly-well-cut-your-throat they may give you just a chance for life. That is useful, anyhow. And, moreover, these foolish natives—if they are not too excited—they always stop to think before they kill a man who says he belongs to any specific organisation. You see? You say then when you are in tight place, “I am Son of the Charm,” and you get—perhaps—ah—your second wind. That is only in extreme instances, or to open negotiations with a stranger. Can you quite see? Verree good. But suppose now, I, or any one of the Department, come to you dressed quite different. You would not know me at all unless I choose, I bet you. Some day I will prove it. I come as Ladakhi trader—oh anything—and I say to you: “You want to buy precious stones?” You say: “Do I look like a man who buys precious stones?” Then I say: “Even verree poor man can buy a turquoise or tarkeean.”

“That is kichree—vegetable curry,’ said Kim.

“Of course it is. You say: “Let me see the tarkeean.” Then I say: “It was cooked by a woman, and perhaps it is bad for your caste.” Then you say: “There is no caste when men go to—look for tarkeean.” You stop a little between those words, “to—look.” That is thee whole secret. The little stop before the words.’

Kim repeated the test-sentence.

“That is all right. Then I will show you my turquoise if there is time, and then you know who I am, and then we exchange views and documents and those-all things. And so it is with any other man of us. We talk sometimes about turquoises and sometimes about

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tarkeean, but always with that little stop in the words. It is verree easy. First, "Son of the Charm," if you are in a tight place. Perhaps that may help you—perhaps not. Then what I have told you about the tarkeean, if you want to transact offeelial business with a strange man. Of course, at present, you have no offeicial business. You are—ah ha!—supernumerary on probation. Quite unique specimen. If you were Asiatic of birth you might be employed right off; but this half-year of leave is to make you de-Englishised, you see? The lama, he expects you, because I have demi-offeicially informed him you have passed all your examinations, and will soon obtain Government appointment. Oh ho! You are on acting-allowance you see: so if you are called upon to help Sons of the Charm mind you jolly well try. Now I shall say good-bye, my dear fellow, and I hope you—ah—will come out top-side all raight.'

Hurree Babu stepped back a pace or two into the crowd at the entrance of Lucknow station and—was gone. Kim drew a deep breath and hugged himself all over. The nickel-plated revolver he could feel in the bosom of his sad-coloured robe, the amulet was on his neck; begging-gourd, rosary, and ghost-dagger (Mr. Lurgan had forgotten nothing) were all to hand, with medicine, paint-box, and compass, and in a worn old purse-belt embroidered with porcupine quill-patterns lay a month's pay. Kings could be no richer. He bought sweetmeats in a leaf-cup from a Hindu trader, and ate them with glad rapture till a policeman ordered him off the steps.

CHAPTER XI

Give the man who is not made
 To his trade
Swords to fling and catch again,
Coins to ring and snatch again,
Men to harm and cure again,
Snakes to charm and lure again—
He'll be hurt by his own blade,
By his serpents disobeyed,
By his clumsiness bewrayed,
By the people mocked to scorn.

So 'tis not with juggler born.
Pinch of dust or withered flower,
Chance-flung fruit or borrowed staff,
Serve his need and shore his power,
Bind the spell, or loose the laugh!

‘But a man who, etc.,’ Op. 15.

FOLOWED a sudden natural reaction. ‘Now am I alone—all alone,’ he thought. ‘In all India is no one so alone as I! If I die to-day, who shall bring the news—and to whom? If I live and God is good, there will be a price upon my head, for I am a Son of the Charm—I, Kim.’

A very few white people, but many Asiatics, can throw themselves into a mazement as it were by repeating their own names over and over again to themselves,

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letting the mind go free upon speculation as to what is called personal identity. When one grows older, the power, usually, departs, but while it lasts it may descend upon a man at any moment.

‘Who is Kim—Kim—Kim?’

He squatted in a corner of the clangng waiting-room, rapt from all other thoughts; hands folded in lap, and pupils contracted to pin-points. In a minute—in another half second—he felt he would arrive at the solution of the tremendous puzzle; but here, as always happens, his mind dropped away from those heights with the rush of a wounded bird, and passing his hand before his eyes, he shook his head.

A long-haired Hindu bairagi (holy man), who had just bought a ticket, halted before him at that moment and stared intently.

‘I also have lost it,’ he said sadly. ‘It is one of the Gates to the Way, but for me it has been shut many years.’

‘What is the talk?’ said Kim, abashed.

‘Thou wast wondering there in thy spirit what manner of thing thy soul might be. The seizure came of a sudden. I know. Who should know but I? Whither goest thou?’

‘Toward Kashi’ (Benares).

‘There are no Gods there. I have proved them. I go to Prayag (Allahabad) for the fifth time—seeking the road to Enlightenment. Of what faith art thou?’

‘I too am a Seeker,’ said Kim, using one of the lama’s pet words. ‘Though’—he forgot his Northern dress for the moment—‘though Allah alone knoweth what I seek.’

The old fellow slipped the bairagi’s crutch under his

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armpit and sat down on a patch of ruddy leopard's skin as Kim rose at the call for the Benares train.

'Go in hope, little brother,' he said. 'It is a long road to the feet of the One; but thither do we all travel.'

Kim did not feel so lonely after this, and ere he had sat out twenty miles in the crowded compartment, was cheering his neighbours with a string of most wonderful yarns about his own and his master's magical gifts.

Benares struck him as a peculiarly filthy city, though it was pleasant to find how his cloth was respected. At least one-third of the population prays eternally to some group or other of the many million deities, and so revere every sort of holy man. Kim was guided to the Temple of the Tirthankers, about a mile outside the city, near Sarnath, by a chance-met Punjabi farmer—a Kamboh from Jullundur-way who had appealed in vain to every God of his homestead to cure his small son, and was trying Benares as a last resort.

'Thou art from the North?' he asked, shouldering through the press of the narrow, stinking streets much like his own pet bull at home.

'Ay, I know the Punjab. My mother was a Pahareen, but my father came from Amritzar—by Jandiala,' said Kim, oiling his ready tongue for the needs of the Road.

'Jandiala—Jullundur? Oho! Then we be neighbours in some sort, as it were.' He nodded tenderly to the wailing child in his arms. 'Whom dost thou serve?'

'A most holy man at the Temple of the Tirthankers.'

'They are all most holy and—most greedy,' said the Jat with bitterness. 'I have walked the pillars and trodden the temples till my feet are flayed, and the child is no whit better. And the mother being sick too. . . . Hush, then, little one. . . . We changed

his name when the fever came. We put him into girl's clothes. There was nothing we did not do, except—I said to his mother when she bundled me off to Benares—she should have come with me—I said Sakhi Sarwar Sultan would serve us best. We know His generosity, but these down-country Gods are strangers.'

The child turned on the cushion of the huge corded arms and looked at Kim through heavy eyelids.

'And was it all worthless?' Kim asked, with easy interest.

'All worthless—all worthless,' said the child, lips cracking with fever.

'The Gods have given him a good mind, at least,' said the father proudly. 'To think he should have listened so cleverly. Yonder is thy temple. Now I am a poor man,—many priests have dealt with me,—but my son is my son, and if a gift to thy master can cure him—I am at my very wits' end.'

Kim considered for a while, tingling with pride. Three years ago he would have made prompt profit on the situation and gone his way without a thought; but now, the very respect the Jat paid him proved that he was a man. Moreover, he had tasted fever once or twice already, and knew enough to recognise starvation when he saw it.

'Call him forth and I will give him a bond on my best yoke, so that the child is cured.'

Kim halted at the carved outer door of the temple. A white-clad Oswal banker from Ajmir, his sins of usury new wiped out, asked him what he did.

'I am chela to Teshoo Lama, an Holy One from Bhotiyal—within there. He bade me come. I wait. Tell him.'

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'Do not forget the child,' cried the importunate Jat over his shoulder, and then bellowed in Punjabi: 'O Holy One—O disciple of the Holy One—O Gods above all the Worlds—behold affliction sitting at the gate!' That cry is so common in Benares that the passers never turned their heads.

The Oswal, at peace with mankind, carried the message into the darkness behind him, and the easy, uncounted Eastern minutes slid by; for the lama was asleep in his cell, and no priest would wake him. When the click of his rosary again broke the hush of the inner court where the calm images of the Arhats stand, a novice whispered, 'Thy chela is here,' and the old man strode forth, forgetting the end of that prayer.

Hardly had the tall figure shown in the doorway than the Jat ran before him, and, lifting up the child, cried: 'Look upon this, Holy One; and if the Gods will, he lives—he lives!'

He fumbled in his waist-belt and drew out a small silver coin.

'What is now?' The lama's eyes turned to Kim. It was noticeable he spoke far clearer Urdu than long ago, under Zam-Zammah; but the father would allow no private talk.

'It is no more than a fever,' said Kim. 'The child is not well fed.'

'He sickens at everything, and his mother is not here.'
'If it be permitted, I may cure, Holy One.'

'What! Have they made thee a healer? Wait here,' said the lama, and he sat down by the Jat upon the lowest step of the temple, while Kim, looking out of the corner of his eyes, slowly opened the little betel-box. He had dreamed dreams at school of returning to the

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lama as a Sahib—of chaffing the old man before he revealed himself—boy's dreams all. There was more drama in this abstracted, brow-puckered search through the tabloid-bottles, with a pause here and there for thought and a muttered invocation between whiles. Quinine he had in tablets, and dark brown meat-lozenges—beef most probably, but that was not his business. The little thing would not eat, but it sucked at a lozenge greedily, and said it liked the salt taste.

'Take then these six.' Kim handed them to the man. 'Praise the Gods, and boil three in milk; other three in water. After he has drunk the milk give him this (it was the half of a quinine pill), and wrap him warm. Give him the water of the other three, and the other half of this white pill when he wakes. Meantime, here is another brown medicine that he may suck at on the way home.'

'Gods, what wisdom!' said the Kamboh, snatching.

It was as much as Kim could remember of his own treatment in a bout of autumn malaria—if you except the patter that he added to impress the lama.

'Now go! Come again in the morning.'

'But the price—the price,' said the Jat, and threw back his sturdy shoulders. 'My son is my son. Now that he will be whole again, how shall I go back to his mother and say I took help by the wayside and did not even give a bowl of curds in return?'

'They are alike, these Jats,' said Kim softly. 'The Jat stood on his dunghill and the King's elephants went by. "O driver," said he, "what will you sell those little donkeys for?"'

The Jat burst into a roar of laughter, stifled with apologies to the lama. 'It is the saying of my own

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country—the very talk of it. So are we Jats all. I will come to-morrow with the child; and the blessing of the Gods of the Homesteads—who are good little Gods—be on you both. . . . Now, son, we grow strong again. Do not spit it out, little Princeling! King of my Heart, do not spit it out, and we shall be strong men, wrestlers and club-wielders, by morning.'

He moved away, crooning and mumbling. The lama turned to Kim, and all the loving old soul of him looked out through his narrow eyes.

'To heal the sick is to acquire merit; but first one gets knowledge. That was wisely done, O Friend of all the World.'

'I was made wise by thee, Holy One,' said Kim, forgetting the little play just ended; forgetting St. Xavier's; forgetting his white blood; forgetting even the Great Game as he stooped, Mohammedan fashion, to touch his master's feet in the dust of the Jain temple. 'My teaching I owe to thee. I have eaten thy bread three years. My time is finished. I am loosed from the schools. I come to thee.'

'Herein is my reward. Enter! Enter! And is all well?' They passed to the inner court, where the afternoon sun sloped golden across. 'Stand that I may see. So!' He peered critically. 'It is no longer a child, but a man, ripened in wisdom, walking as a physician. I did well—I did well when I gave thee up to the armed men on that black night. Dost thou remember our first day under Zam-Zammah?'

'Ay,' said Kim. 'Dost thou remember when I leapt off the carriage the first day I went to—'

'The Gates of Learning? Truly. And the day that we ate the cakes together at the back of the river by

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Nucklao. Aha! Many times hast thou begged for me, but that day I begged for thee.'

'Good reason,' quoth Kim. 'I was then a scholar in the Gates of Learning, and attired as a Sahib. Do not forget, Holy One,' he went on playfully, 'I am still a Sahib—by thy favour.'

'True. And a Sahib in most high esteem. Come to my cell, chela.'

'How is that known to thee?'

The lama smiled. 'First by means of letters from the kindly priest whom we met in the camp of armed men; but he is now gone to his own country, and I sent the money to his brother.' Colonel Creighton, who had succeeded to the trusteeship when Father Victor went to England with the Mavericks, was hardly the chaplain's brother. 'But I do not well understand Sahibs' letters. They must be interpreted to me. I chose a surer way. Many times when I returned from my Search to this temple, which has always been a nest to me, there came one seeking Enlightenment—a man from Leh—that had been, he said, a Hindu, but wearied of all those Gods.' The lama pointed to the Arhats.

'A fat man?' said Kim, a twinkle in his eye.

'Very fat; but I perceived in a little his mind was wholly given up to useless things—such as devils and charms and the form and fashion of our tea-drinkings in the monasteries, and by what road we initiated the novices. A man abounding in questions; but he was a friend of thine, chela. He told me that thou wast on the road to much honour as a scribe. And I see thou art a physician.'

'Yes, that am I—a scribe, when I am a Sahib, but it

is set aside when I come as thy disciple. I have accomplished the years appointed for a Sahib.'

'As it were a novice?' said the lama, nodding his head. 'Art thou freed from the schools? I would not have thee unripe.'

'I am all free. In due time I take service under the Government as a scribe—'

'Not as a warrior. That is well.'

'But first I come to wander—with thee. Therefore I am here. Who begs for thee, these days?' he went on quickly. The ice was thin.

'Very often I beg myself; but, as thou knowest, I am seldom here, except when I come to look again at my disciple. From one end to another of Hind have I travelled afoot and in the te-rain. A great and a wonderful land! But here, when I put in, is as though I were in my own Bhotiyal.'

He looked round the little clean cell complacently. A low cushion gave him a seat, on which he had disposed himself in the cross-legged attitude of the Bodhisat emerging from meditation; a black teak-wood table, not twenty inches high, set with copper tea-cups, was before him. In one corner stood a tiny altar, also of heavily carved teak, bearing a copper-gilt image of the seated Buddha and fronted by a lamp, an incense-holder, and a pair of copper flower-pots.

'The Keeper of the Images in the Wonder House acquired merit by giving me these a year since,' he said, following Kim's eye. 'When one is far from one's own land such things carry remembrance; and we must reverence the Lord for that He showed the Way. See!' he pointed to a curiously-built mound of coloured rice crowned with a fantastic metal ornament. 'When I

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was abbot in my own place—before I came to better knowledge—I made that offering daily. It is the Sacrifice of the Universe to the Lord. Thus do we of Bhotiyal offer all the world daily to the Excellent Law. And I do it even now, though I know that the Excellent One is beyond all pinchings and pattings.' He snuffed from his gourd.

'It is well done, Holy One,' Kim murmured, sinking at ease on the cushions, very happy and rather tired.

'And also,' the old man chuckled, 'I write pictures of the Wheel of Life. Three days to a picture. I was busied on it—or it may be I shut my eyes a little—when they brought word of thee. It is good to have thee here: I will show thee my art—not for pride's sake, but because thou must learn. The Sahibs have not all this world's wisdom.'

He drew from under the table a sheet of strangely scented yellow Chinese paper, the brushes, and slab of India ink. In cleanest, severest outline he had traced the Great Wheel with its six spokes, whose centre is the conjoined Hog, Snake, and Dove (Ignorance, Anger, and Lust), and whose compartments are all the heavens and hells, and all the chances of human life. Men say that the Bodhisat Himself first drew it with grains of rice upon dust, to teach His disciples the cause of things. Many ages have crystallised it into a most wonderful convention crowded with hundreds of little figures whose every line carries a meaning. Few can translate the picture-parable; there are not twenty in all the world who can draw it surely without a copy: of those who can both draw and expound are but three.

'I have a little learned to draw,' said Kim. 'But this is a marvel beyond marvels.'

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‘I have written it for many years,’ said the lama. ‘Time was when I could write it all between one lamp-lighting and the next. I will teach thee the art—after due preparation; and I will show thee the meaning of the Wheel.’

‘We take the Road, then?’

‘The Road and our Search. I was but waiting for thee. It was made plain to me in a hundred dreams—notably one that came upon the night of the day that the Gates of Learning first shut—that without thee I should never find my River. Again and again, as thou knowest, I put this from me, fearing an illusion. Therefore I would not take thee with me that day at Lucknow, when we ate the cakes. I would not take thee till the time was ripe and auspicious. From the Hills to the Sea, from the Sea to the Hills have I gone, but it was vain. Then I remembered the “Jataka.”’

He told Kim the story of the elephant with the leg-iron, as he had told it so often to the Jain priests.

‘Further testimony is not needed,’ he ended serenely. ‘Thou wast sent for an aid. That aid removed, my Search came to naught. Therefore we will go out again together, and our Search is sure.’

‘Whither go we?’

‘What matters, Friend of all the World? The Search, I say, is sure. If need be, the River will break from the ground before us. I acquired merit when I sent thee to the Gates of Learning, and gave thee the jewel that is Wisdom. Thou didst return, I saw even now, a follower of Sakyamuni, the Physician, whose altars are many in Bhotiyal. It is sufficient. We are together, and all things are as they were—Friend of all the World—Friend of the Stars—my chela!’

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Then they talked of matters secular; but it was noticeable that the lama never demanded any details of life at St. Xavier's, nor showed the faintest curiosity as to the manners and customs of Sahibs. His mind moved all in the past, and he revived every step of their wonderful first journey together, rubbing his hands and chuckling, till it pleased him to curl himself up into the sudden sleep of old age.

Kim watched the last dusty sunshine fade out of the court, and played with his ghost-dagger and rosary. The clamour of Benares, oldest of all earth's cities awake before the Gods, day and night, beat round the walls as the sea's roar round a breakwater. Now and again, a Jain priest crossed the court, with some small offering to the images, and swept the path about him lest by chance he should take the life of a living thing. A lamp twinkled, and there followed the sound of a prayer. Kim watched the stars as they rose one after another in the still, sticky dark, till he fell asleep at the foot of the altar. That night he dreamed in Hindustanee, with never an English word. . . .

'Holy One, there is the child to whom we gave the medicine,' he said, about three o'clock in the morning, when the lama, also waking from dreams, would have fared forth on pilgrimage. 'The Jat will be here at the light.'

'I am well answered. In my haste I would have done a wrong.' He sat down on the cushions and returned to his rosary. 'Surely old folk are as children,' he said pathetically. 'They desire a matter—behold, it must be done at once, or they fret and weep! Many times when I was upon the Road I have been ready to stamp with my feet at the hindrance of an ox-cart in the way.'

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or a mere cloud of dust. It was not so when I was a man—a long time ago. None the less it is wrongful—'

'But thou art indeed old, Holy One.'

'The thing was done. A Cause was put out into the world, and, old or young, sick or sound, knowing or unknowing, who can rein in the effect of that Cause? Does the Wheel hang still if a child spin it—or a drunkard? Chela, this is a great and a terrible world.'

'I think it good,' Kim yawned. 'What is there to eat? I have not eaten since yesterday even.'

'I had forgotten thy need. Yonder is good Bhotiyal tea and cold rice.'

'We cannot walk far on such stuff.' Kim felt all the European's lust for flesh-meat, which is not accessible in a Jain temple. Yet, instead of going out at once with the begging-bowl, he stayed his stomach on slabs of cold rice till the full dawn. It brought the farmer, voluble, stuttering with gratitude.

'In the night the fever broke and the sweat came,' he cried. 'Feel here—his skin is fresh and new! He esteemed the salt lozenges, and took milk with greed.' He drew the cloth from the child's face, and it smiled sleepily at Kim. A little knot of Jain priests, silent but all-observant, gathered by the temple door. They knew, and Kim knew that they knew, how the old lama had met his disciple. Being courteous folk, they had not obtruded themselves overnight by presence, word, or gesture. Wherefore Kim repaid them as the sun rose.

'Thank the Gods of the Jains, brother,' he said, not knowing how those Gods were named. 'The fever is indeed broken.'

'Look! See!' The lama beamed in the background

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upon his hosts of three years. ‘Was there ever such a chela? He follows our Lord the Healer.’

Now the Jains officially recognise all the Gods of the Hindu creed, as well as the Lingam and the Snake. They wear the Brahminical thread; they adhere to every claim of Hindu caste-law. But, because they knew and loved the lama, because he was an old man, because he sought the Way, because he was their guest, and because he colloqued long of nights with the head-priest—as free-thinking a metaphysician as ever split one hair into seventy—they murmured assent.

‘Remember,’—Kim bent over the child,—‘this trouble may come again.’

‘Not if thou hast the proper spell,’ said the father.

‘But in a little while we go away.’

‘True,’ said the lama to all the Jains. ‘We go now together upon the Search whereof I have often spoken. I waited till my chela was ripe. Behold him! We go North. Never again shall I look upon this place of my rest, O people of good will.’

‘But I am not a beggar.’ The cultivator rose to his feet, clutching the child.

‘Be still. Do not trouble the Holy One,’ a priest cried.

‘Go,’ Kim whispered. ‘Meet us again under the big railway bridge, and for the sake of all the Gods of our Punjab, bring food—curry, pulse, cakes fried in fat, and sweetmeats. Specially sweetmeats. Be swift!’

The pallor of hunger suited Kim very well as he stood, tall and slim, in his sad-coloured, sweeping robes, one hand on his rosary and the other in the attitude of benediction, faithfully copied from the lama. An English observer might have said that he looked rather like the

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young saint of a stained-glass window, whereas he was but a growing lad faint with emptiness.

Long and formal were the farewells, thrice ended and thrice renewed. The Seeker—he who had invited the lama to that haven from far-away Tibet, a silver-faced, hairless ascetic—took no part in it, but meditated, as always, alone among the images. The others were very human; pressing small comforts upon the old man,—a betel-box, a fine new iron pencase, a food-bag, and such like,—warning him against the dangers of the world without, and prophesying a happy end to the Search. Meantime Kim, lonelier than ever, squatted on the steps, and swore to himself in the language of St. Xavier's.

'But it is my own fault,' he concluded. 'With Mahbub, I ate Mahbub's bread, or Lurgan Sahib's. At St. Xavier's, three meals a day. Here I must jolly well look out for myself. Besides, I am not in good training. How I could eat a plate of beef now! . . . Is it finished, Holy One?'

The lama, both hands raised, intoned a final blessing in ornate Chinese. 'I must lean on thy shoulder,' said he, as the temple-gates closed. 'We grow stiff, I think.'

The weight of a six-foot man is not light to steady through miles of crowded streets, and Kim, loaded down with bundles and packages for the way, was glad to reach the shadow of the railway bridge.

'Here we eat,' he said resolutely, as the Kamboh, blue-robed and smiling, hove in sight, a basket in one hand and the child on the other.

'Fall to, Holy Ones!' he cried from fifty yards. (They were by the shoal under the first bridge-span, out of sight of hungry priests.) 'Rice and good curry, cakes

all warm and well scented with hing (asafœtida), curds and sugar. 'King of my fields,' this to the small son, 'let us show these holy men that we Jats of Jullundur can pay a service. . . . I had heard the Jains would eat nothing that they had not cooked, but truly'—he looked away politely over the broad river—'where there is no eye there is no caste.'

'And we,' said Kim, turning his back and heaping a leaf-platter for the lama, 'are beyond all castes.'

They gorged themselves on the good food in silence. Nor till he had licked the last of the sticky sweet-stuff from his little finger did Kim note that the Kamboh too was girt for travel.

'If our roads lie together,' he said roughly, 'I go with thee. One does not often find a worker of miracles, and the child is still weak. But I am not altogether a reed.' He picked up his lathi—a five-foot male-bamboo ringed with bands of polished iron—and flourished it in the air. 'The Jats are called quarrelsome, but that is not true. Except when we are crossed, we are like our own buffaloes.'

'So be it,' said Kim. 'A good stick is a good reason.'

The lama gazed placidly up-stream, where in long, smudged perspective the ceaseless columns of smoke go up from the burning-ghats by the river. Now and again, despite all municipal regulations, the fragment of a half-burned body bobbed by on the full current.

'But for thee,' said the Kamboh to Kim, drawing his child into his hairy breast, 'I might to-day have gone thither—with this one. The priests tell us that Benares is holy—which none doubt—and desirable to die in. But I do not know their Gods, and they ask for money; and when one has done one worship a shaved-head vows

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it is of none effect except one do another. Wash here! Wash there! Pour, drink, lave, and scatter flowers—but always pay the priests. No, the Punjab for me, and the soil of the Jullundur-doab for the best soil in it.'

'I have said many times—in the temple I think—that if need be, the River will open at our feet. We will therefore go North,' said the lama, rising. 'I remember a pleasant place, set about with fruit-trees, where one can walk in meditation—and the air is cooler there. It comes from the Hills and the snow of the Hills.'

'What is the name?' said Kim.

'How should I know? Didst thou not—no, that was after the Army rose out of the earth and took thee away. I abode there in meditation in a room against the dove-cot—except when she talked eternally.'

'Oho! the woman from Kulu. That is by Saharun-pore,' Kim laughed.

'How does the spirit move thy master? Does he go afoot, for the sake of past sins?' the Jat demanded cautiously. 'It is a far cry to Delhi.'

'No,' said Kim. 'I will beg a tikkut for the te-rain.' One does not own to the possession of money in India.

'Then in the name of the Gods, let us take the fire-carriage. My son is best in his mother's arms. The Government has brought on us many taxes, but it gives us one good thing—the te-rain that joins friends and unites the anxious. A wonderful matter is the te-rain.'

They all piled into it a couple of hours later, and slept through the heat of the day. The Kamboh plied Kim with ten thousand questions as to the lama's walk and work in life, and received some curious answers. Kim was content to be where he was, to look out upon the flat North-Western landscape, and to talk to the chang-

KIM

ing mob of fellow-passengers. Even to-day, tickets and ticket-clipping are dark oppression to Indian rustics. They do not understand why, when they have paid for a magic piece of paper, strangers should punch great pieces out of the charm. So long and furious are the debates between travellers and Eurasian ticket-collectors. Kim assisted at two or three with grave advice, meant to darken council and to show off his wisdom before the lama and the admiring Kamboh. But at Somna Road the Fates sent him a matter to think upon. There tumbled into the compartment, as the train was moving off, a mean, lean little person—a Mahratta, so far as Kim could judge by the cock of the tight turban. His face was cut, his muslin upper-garment was badly torn, and one leg was bandaged. He told them that a country-cart had upset and nearly slain him: he was going to Delhi, where his son lived. Kim watched him closely. If, as he asserted, he had been rolled over and over on the earth, there should have been signs of gravel-rash on the skin. But all his injuries seemed clean cuts, and a mere fall from a cart could not cast a man into such extremity of terror. As, with shaking fingers, he knotted up the torn cloth about his neck he laid bare an amulet of the kind called a keeper-up of the heart. Now, amulets are common enough, but they are not generally strung on square-plaited copper wire, and still fewer amulets bear black enamel on silver. There were none except the Kamboh and the lama in the compartment, which, luckily, was of an old type with solid ends. Kim made as to scratch in his bosom, and thereby lifted his own amulet. The Mahratta's face changed altogether at the sight, and he disposed the amulet fairly on his breast.

KIM

‘Yes,’ he went on to the Kamboh, ‘I was in haste, and the cart, driven by a bastard, bound its wheel in a water-cut, and besides the harm done to me there was lost a full dish of tarkeean. I was not a Son of the Charm (a lucky man) that day.’

‘That was a great loss,’ said Kamboh, withdrawing interest. His experience of Benares had made him suspicious.

‘Who cooked it?’ said Kim.

‘A woman.’ The Mahratta raised his eyes.

‘But all women can cook tarkeean,’ said the Kamboh.
‘It is a good curry, as I know.’

‘Oh, yes, it is a good curry,’ said the Mahratta.

‘And cheap,’ said Kim. ‘But what about caste?’

‘Oh, there is no caste where men go to—look for tarkeean,’ the Mahratta replied, in the prescribed cadence.
‘Of whose service art thou?’

‘Of the service of this Holy One.’ Kim pointed to the happy, drowsy lama, who woke with a jerk at the well-loved word.

‘Ah, he was sent from Heaven to aid me. He is called the Friend of all the World. He is also called the Friend of the Stars. He walks as a physician—his time being ripe. Great is his wisdom.’

‘And a Son of the Charm,’ said Kim under his breath, as the Kamboh made haste to prepare a pipe lest the Mahratta should beg.

‘And who is that?’ the Mahratta asked, glancing sideways nervously.

‘One whose child I—we have cured, who lies under great debt to us.—Sit by the window, man from Jullundur. Here is a sick one.’

‘Humph! I have no desire to mix with chance-met

KIM

wastrels. My ears are not long. I am not a woman wishing to overhear secrets.' The Jat slid himself heavily into a far corner.

'Art thou anything of a healer? I am ten leagues deep in calamity,' cried the Mahratta, picking up the cue.

'The man is cut and bruised all over. I go about to cure him,' Kim retorted. 'None interfered between thy babe and me.'

'I am rebuked,' said the Kamboh meekly. 'I am thy debtor for the life of my son. Thou art a miracle-worker—I know it.'

'Show me the cuts.' Kim bent over the Mahratta's neck, his heart nearly choking him; for this was the Great Game with a vengeance. 'Now, tell thy tale swiftly, brother, while I say a charm.'

'I come from the South, where my work lay. One of us they slew by the roadside. Hast thou heard?' Kim shook his head. He, of course, knew nothing of E.23's predecessor, slain down South in the habit of an Arab trader. 'Having found a certain letter which I was sent to seek, I came away. I escaped from the city and ran to Mhow. So sure was I that none knew, I did not change my face. At Mhow a woman brought charge against me of theft of jewellery in that city which I had left. Then I saw the cry was out against me. I ran from Mhow by night, bribing the police, who had been bribed to hand me over without question to my enemies in the South. Then I lay in old Chitor city a week, a penitent in a temple, but I could not get rid of the letter which was my charge. I buried it under the Queen's Stone, at Chitor, in the place known to us all.'

KIM

Kim did not know, but not for worlds would he have broken the thread.

‘At Chitor, look you, I was all in Kings’ country; for Kotah to the east is beyond the Queen’s law, and east again lie Jeypur and Gwalior. Neither love spies, and there is no justice. I was hunted like a wet jackal; but I broke through at Bandakui, where I heard there was a charge against me of murder in the city I had left—of the murder of a boy. They have both the corpse and the witnesses waiting.’

‘But cannot the Government protect?’

‘We of the Game are beyond protection. If we die, we die. Our names are blotted from the book. That is all. At Bandakui, where lives one of us, I thought to slip the scent by changing my face, and so made me a Mahratta. Then I came to Agra, and would have turned back to Chitor to recover the letter. So sure I was I had slipped them. Therefore I did not send a tar (telegram) to any one saying where the letter lay. I wished the credit of it all.’

Kim nodded. He understood that feeling well.

‘But at Agra, walking in the streets, a man cried a debt against me, and approaching with many witnesses, would hale me to the courts then and there. Oh, they are clever in the South! He recognised me as his agent for cotton. May he burn in Hell for it!’

‘And wast thou?’

‘O fool! I was the man they sought for the matter of the letter! I ran into the Fleshers’ Ward and came out by the House of the Jew, who feared a riot and pushed me forth. I came afoot to Somna Road—I had only money for my tikkut to Delhi—and there, while I lay in a ditch with a fever, one sprang out of the bushes and

KIM

beat me and cut me and searched me from head to foot.
Within earshot of the te-rain it was!

‘Why did he not slay thee out of hand?’

‘They are not so foolish. If I am taken in Delhi at the instance of lawyers, upon a proven charge of murder, my body is handed over to the State that desires it. I go back guarded, and then—I die slowly for an example to the rest of us. The South is not my country. I run in circles—like a goat with one eye. I have not eaten for two days. I am marked’—he touched the filthy bandage on his leg—‘so that they will know me at Delhi.’

‘Thou art safe in the te-rain, at least.’

‘Live a year at the Great Game and tell me that again! The wires will be out against me at Delhi, describing every tear and rag upon me. Twenty—a hundred, if need be—will have seen me slay that boy. And thou art useless!’

Kim knew enough of native methods of attack not to doubt that the case would be deadly complete—even to the corpse. The Mahratta twitched his fingers with pain from time to time. The Kamboh in his corner glared sullenly; the lama was busy over his beads; and Kim, fumbling doctor-fashion at the man’s neck, thought out his plan between invocations.

‘Hast thou a charm to change my shape? Else I am dead. Five—ten minutes alone, if I had not been so pressed, and I might—’

‘Is he cured yet, miracle-worker?’ said the Kamboh jealously. ‘Thou hast chanted long enough.’

‘Nay. There is no cure for his hurts, as I see, except he sit for three days in the habit of a bairagi.’ This is a common penance, often imposed on a fat trader by his spiritual teacher.

KIM

‘One priest always goes about to make another priest,’ was the retort. Like most grossly superstitious folk, the Kamboh could not keep his tongue from deriding his Church.

‘Will thy son be a priest, then? It is time he took more of my quinine.’

‘We Jats are all buffaloes,’ said the Kamboh, softening anew.

Kim rubbed a finger-tip of bitterness on the child’s trusting little lips. ‘I have asked for nothing,’ he said sternly to the father, ‘except food. Dost thou grudge me that? I go to heal another man. Have I thy leave—Prince?’

Up flew the man’s huge paws in supplication. ‘Nay—nay. Do not mock me thus.’

‘It pleases me to cure this sick one. Thou shalt acquire merit by aiding. What colour ash is there in thy pipe-bowl? White. That is auspicious. Was there raw turmeric among thy food-stuffs?’

‘I—I—’

‘Open thy bundle!’

It was the usual collection of small oddments: bits of cloth, quack medicines, cheap fairings, a clothful of atta,—grayish, rough-ground native flour,—twists of down-country tobacco, tawdry pipe-stems, and a packet of curry-stuff, all wrapped in a quilt. Kim turned it over with the air of a wise warlock, muttering a Mohammedan invocation.

‘This is wisdom I learned from the Sahibs,’ he whispered to the lama; and here, when one thinks of his training at Lurgan’s, he spoke no more than the truth. ‘There is a great evil in this man’s fortune, as shown by the stars, which—which troubles him. Shall I take it away?’

KIM

'Friend of the Stars, thou hast done well in all things.
Let it be at thy pleasure. Is it another healing?'

'Quick! Be quick!' gasped the Mahratta. 'The train may stop.'

'A healing against the shadow of death,' said Kim, mixing the Kamboh's flour with the mingled charcoal and tobacco ash in the red-earth bowl of the pipe. E.23, without a word, slipped off his turban and shook down his long black hair.

'That is my food—priest,' the Jat growled.

'A buffalo in the temple! Hast thou dared to look even thus far?' said Kim. 'I must do mysteries before fools; but have a care for thy eyes. Is there a film before them already? I save the babe, and for return thou—oh, shameless!' The man flinched at the direct gaze, for Kim was wholly in earnest. 'Shall I curse thee, or shall I—' He picked up the outer cloth of the bundle and threw it over the bowed head. 'Dare so much as to think a wish to see, and—and—even I cannot save thee. Sit! Be dumb!'

'I am blind—dumb. Forbear to curse! Co—come, child; we will play a game of hiding. Do not, for my sake, look from under the cloth.'

'I see hope,' said E.23. 'What is thy scheme?'

'This comes next,' said Kim, plucking the thin body-shirt. E.23 hesitated, with all a North-West man's dislike of baring his body.

'What is caste to a cut throat?' said Kim, rending it to the waist. 'We must make thee a yellow Saddhu all over. Strip—strip swiftly, and shake thy hair over thy eyes while I scatter the ash. Now, a caste-mark on thy forehead.' He drew from his bosom the little Survey paint-box and a cake of crimson lake.

KIM

'Art thou only a beginner?' said E.23, labouring literally for the dear life, as he slid out of his body-wrappings and stood clear in the loin-cloth while Kim splashed in a noble caste-mark on the ash-smeared brow.

'But two days entered to the Game, brother,' Kim replied. 'Smear more ash on the bosom.'

'Hast thou met—a physician of sick pearls?' He switched out his long, tight-rolled turban-cloth and, with swiftest hands, rolled it over and under about his loins into the intricate devices of a Saddhu's cincture.

'Hah! Dost thou know his touch, then? He was my teacher for a while. We must bar thy legs. Ash cures wounds. Smear it again.'

'I was his pride once, but thou art almost better. The Gods are kind to us! Give me that.'

It was a tin box of opium pills among the rubbish of the Jat's bundle. E.23 gulped down a half handful. 'They are good against hunger, fear, and chill. And they make the eyes red too,' he explained. 'Now I shall have heart to play the Game. We lack only a Saddhu's tongs. What of the old clothes?'

Kim rolled them small, and stuffed them into the slack folds of his tunic. With a yellow-ochre paint cake he smeared the legs and breast, great streaks against the background of flour, ash, and turmeric.

'The blood on them is enough to hang thee, brother.'

'May be; but no need to throw them out of the window. . . . It is finished.' His voice thrilled with a boy's pure delight in the Game. 'Turn and look, O Jat!'

'The Gods protect us' said the hooded Kamboh, emerging like a buffalo from the reeds. 'But—whither went the Mahratta? What hast thou done?'

Kim had been trained by Lurgan Sahib; and E.23,

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by virtue of his business, was no bad actor. In place of the tremulous, shrinking trader there lolled against the corner an all but naked, ash-smeared, ochre-barred, dusty-haired Saddhu, his swollen eyes—opium takes quick effect on an empty stomach—luminous with insolence and bestial lust, his legs crossed under him, Kim's brown rosary round his neck, and a scant yard of worn, flowered chintz on his shoulders. The child buried his face in his amazed father's arms.

'Look up, Princeling! We travel with warlocks, but they will not hurt thee. Oh, do not cry. . . . What is the sense of curing a child one day and killing him with fright the next?'

'The child will be fortunate all his life. He has seen a great healing. When I was a child I made clay men and horses.'

'I have made them too. Sir Banas, he comes in the night and makes them all alive at the back of our kitchen-midden,' piped the child.

'And so thou art not frightened at anything. Eh, Prince?'

'I was frightened because my father was frightened. I felt his arms shake.'

'Oh, chicken-man,' said Kim, and even the abashed Jat laughed. 'I have done a healing on this poor trader. He must forsake his gains and his account-books, and sit by the wayside three nights to overcome the malignity of his enemies. The Stars are against him.'

'The fewer money-lenders the better, say I; but, Saddhu or no Saddhu, he should pay for my stuff on his shoulders.'

'So? But that is thy child on thy shoulder—given over to the burning-ghat not two days ago. There

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remains one thing more. I did this charm in thy presence because need was great. I changed his shape and his soul. None the less, if, by any chance, O man from Jullundur, thou rememberest what thou hast seen, either among the elders sitting under the village tree, or in thy own house, or in company of thy priest when he blesses thy cattle, a murrain will come among the buffaloes, and a fire in thy thatch, and rats in the corn-bin, and the curse of our Gods upon thy fields that they may be barren before thy feet and after thy plough-share.' This was part of an old curse picked up from a faqir by the Taksali Gate in the days of Kim's innocence. It lost nothing by repetition.

'Cease, Holy One! In mercy, cease!' cried the Jat. 'Do not curse the household. I saw nothing! I heard nothing! I am thy cow!' and he made to grab at Kim's bare foot beating rhythmically on the carriage floor.

'But since thou hast been permitted to aid me in the matter of a pinch of flour and a little opium and such trifles as I have honoured by using in my art, so will the Gods return a blessing,' and he gave it at length, to the man's immense relief. It was one that he had learned from Lurgan Sahib.

The lama stared through his spectacles as he had not stared at the business of disguisement.

'Friend of the Stars,' he said at last, 'thou hast acquired great wisdom. Beware that it do not give birth to pride. No man having the Law before his eyes speaks hastily of any matter which he has seen or encountered.'

'No—no—no indeed,' cried the farmer, fearful lest the master should be minded to improve on the pupil.

KIM

E.23, with relaxed mouth, gave himself up to the opium that is meat, tobacco, and medicine to the spent Asiatic.

So, in a silence of awe and great miscomprehension, they slid into Delhi about lamp-lighting time.

CHAPTER XII

‘Who hath desired the Sea—the sight of salt-water unbounded?
The heave and the halt and the hurl and the crash o’
the comber wind-hounded?
The sleek-barrelled swell before storm—gray, foamless,
enormous, and growing?
Stark calm on the lap of the Line—or the crazy-eyed
hurricane blowing?
His Sea in no showing the same—his Sea and the same
'neath all showing—
 His Sea that his being fulfils?
So and no otherwise—so and no otherwise Hill-men
desire their Hills!’

‘**I**HAVE found my heart again,’ said E.23, under cover of the platform’s tumult. ‘Hunger and fear make men dazed, or I might have thought of this escape before. I was right. They come to hunt for me. Thou hast saved my head.

A group of yellow-trousered Punjab policemen, headed by a hot and perspiring young Englishman, parted the crowd about the carriages. Behind them, inconspicuous as a cat, ambled a small fat person who looked like a lawyer’s tout.

‘See the young Sahib reading from a paper. My

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description is in his hand,' said E.23. 'They go carriage by carriage, like fisher-folk netting a pool.'

When the procession reached their compartment, E.23 was counting his beads with a steady jerk of the wrist; while Kim jeered at him for being so drugged as to have lost the ringed fire-tongs which are the Saddhu's distinguishing mark. The lama, deep in meditation, stared straight before him; and the farmer, glancing furtively, gathered up his belongings.

'Nothing here but a parcel of holy-bolies,' said the Englishman aloud, and passed on amid a ripple of uneasiness; for native police mean extortion to the native all India over.

'The trouble now,' whispered E.23, 'lies in sending a wire as to the place where I hid that letter I was sent to find. I cannot go to the tar-office in this guise.'

'Is it not enough I have saved thy neck?'

'Not if the work be left unfinished. Did never the healer of sick pearls tell thee so? Comes another Sahib! Ah!'

This was a tallish, sallowish District Superintendent of Police,—belt, helmet, polished spurs and all,—strutting and twirling his dark moustache.

'What fools are these Police Sahibs!' said Kim genially.

E.23 glanced up under his eyelids. 'It is well said,' he muttered in a changed voice. 'I go to drink water. Keep my place.'

He blundered out almost into the Englishman's arms, and was bad-worded in clumsy Urdu.

'Tum-mut? You drunk? You mustn't bang about as though Delhi station belonged to you, my friend.'

E.23, not moving a muscle of his countenance, an-

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swered with a stream of the filthiest abuse, at which Kim naturally rejoiced. It reminded him of the drummer-boys and the barrack-sweepers at Umballa in the terrible time of his first schooling.

'My good fool,' the Englishman drawled. 'Nickle-jao! Go back to your carriage.'

Step by step, withdrawing deferentially, and dropping his voice, the yellow Saddhu clomb back to the carriage, cursing the D. S. P. to remotest posterity by—here Kim almost jumped—by the curse of the Queen's Stone, by the writing under the Queen's Stone, and by an assortment of Gods with wholly new names.

'I don't know what you're saying,'—the Englishman flushed angrily,—'but it's some piece of blasted impertinence. Come out of that!'

E.23, affecting to misunderstand, gravely produced his ticket, which the Englishman wrenched angrily from his hand.

'Oh zoolum! What oppression!' growled the Jat from his corner. 'All for the sake of a jest too.' He had been grinning at the freedom of the Saddhu's tongue. 'Thy charms do not work well to-day, Holy One!'

The Saddhu followed the policeman, fawning and supplicating. The ruck of passengers, busy with their babies and their bundles, had not noticed the affair. Kim slipped out behind him; for it flashed through his head that he had heard this angry, stupid Sahib discoursing loud personalities to an old lady near Umballa three years ago.

'It is well,' the Saddhu whispered, jammed in the calling, shouting, bewildered press—a Persian greyhound between his feet and a cadgeful of yelling hawks

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under charge of a Rajput falconer in the small of his back. ‘He has gone now to send word of the letter which I hid. They told me he was in Peshawur. I might have known that he is like the crocodile—always at the other ford. He has saved me from present calamity, but I owe my life to thee.’

‘Is he also one of Us?’ Kim ducked under a Mewar camel-driver’s greasy armpit and cannoned off a covey of jabbering Sikh matrons.

‘Not less than the greatest. We are both fortunate! I will make report to him of what thou hast done. I am safe under his protection.’

He bored through the edge of the crowd besieging the carriages, and squatted by the bench near the telegraph-office.

‘Return, or they take thy place! Have no fear for the work, brother—or my life. Thou hast given me breathing-space, and Strickland Sahib has pulled me to land. We may work together at the Game yet. Farewell!’

Kim hurried to his carriage: elated, bewildered, but a little nettled in that he had no key to the secrets about him.

‘I am only a beginner at the Game, that is sure. I could not have leaped into safety as did the Saddhu. He knew it was darkest under the lamp. I could not have thought to tell news under pretence of cursing . . . and how clever was the Sahib! No matter, I saved the life of one. . . . Where is the Kamboh gone, Holy One?’ he whispered, as he took his seat in the now crowded compartment.

‘A fear gripped him,’ the lama replied, with a touch of tender malice. ‘He saw thee change the Mahratta

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to a Saddhu in the twinkling of an eye, as a protection against evil. That shook him. Then he saw the Saddhu fall sheer into the hands of the polis—all the effect of thy art. Then he gathered up his son and fled; for he said that thou didst change a quiet trader into an impudent bandier of words with the Sahibs, and he feared a like fate. Where is the Saddhu?

‘With the polis,’ said Kim. . . . ‘Yet I saved the Kamboh’s child.’

The lama snuffed blandly.

‘Ah, chela, see how thou art overtaken! Thou didst cure the Kamboh’s child solely to acquire merit. But thou didst put a spell on the Mahratta with prideful workings—I watched thee—and with side-long glances to bewilder an old old man and a foolish farmer: whence calamity and suspicion.’

Kim controlled himself with an effort beyond his years. Not more than any other youngster did he like to eat dirt or to be misjudged, but he saw himself in a cleft stick. The train rolled out of Delhi into the night.

‘It is true,’ he murmured. ‘Where I have offended thee I have done wrong.’

‘It is more, chela. Thou hast loosed an Act upon the world, and as a stone thrown into a pool so spread the consequences thou canst not tell how far.’

This ignorance was well both for Kim’s vanity and for the lama’s peace of mind, when we think that there was then being handed in at Simla a code-wire reporting the arrival of E.23 at Delhi, and, more important, the whereabouts of a letter he had been commissioned to—abstract. Incidentally, an over-zealous policeman had arrested, on charge of murder done in a far southern State, a horribly indignant Ajmir cotton-broker, who

KIM

was explaining himself to a Mr. Strickland on Delhi platform, while E.23 was paddling through by-ways into the locked heart of Delhi city. In two hours several telegrams had reached the angry minister of a southern State reporting that all trace of a somewhat bruised Mahratta had been lost; and by the time the leisurely train halted at Saharunpore the last ripple of the stone Kim had helped to heave was lapping against the steps of a mosque in far-away Roum—where it disturbed a pious man at prayers.

The lama made his in ample form near the dewy bougainvillea-trellis near the platform, cheered by the clear sunshine and the presence of his disciple. ‘We will put these things behind us,’ he said, indicating the brazen engine and the gleaming track. ‘The jolting of the te-rain—though a wonderful thing—has turned my bones to water. We will use clean air henceforward.’

‘Let us go to the Kulu woman’s house,’ said Kim, and stepped forth cheerily under the bundles. Early morning Saharunpore-way is clean and well scented. He thought of the other mornings at St. Xavier’s, and it topped his already thrice-heaped contentment.

‘Where is this new haste born from? Wise men do not run about like chickens in the sun. We have come hundreds upon hundreds of kos already, and, till now, I have scarcely been alone with thee an instant. How canst thou receive instruction all jostled of crowds? How can I, whelmed by a flux of talk, meditate upon the Way?’

‘Her tongue grows no shorter with the years, then?’
The disciple smiled.

‘Nor her desire for charms. I remember once when I spoke of the Wheel of Life’—the lama fumbled in his

KIM

bosom for his latest copy—‘she was only curious about the devils that besiege children. She shall acquire merit by entertaining us—in a little while—at an after-occasion—softly, softly. Now we will wander loose-foot, waiting upon the Chain of Things. The Search is sure.’

So they travelled very easily across and among the broad bloomful fruit-gardens—by way of Aminabad, Sahaigunge, Akrola of the Ford, and little Phulesa—the line of the Sewaliks always to the north, and behind them again the snows. After long, sweet sleep under the dry stars came the lordly, leisurely passage through a waking village—begging-bowl held forth in silence, but eyes roving in defiance of the Law from sky’s edge to sky’s edge. Then would Kim return soft-footed through the soft dust to his master under the shadow of a mango tree or the thinner shade of a white Doon siris, to eat and drink at ease. At mid-day, after talk and a little wayfaring, they slept; meeting the world refreshed when the air was cooler. Night found them adventuring into new territory—some chosen village spied three hours before across the fat land, and much discussed upon the road.

There they told their tale,—a new one each evening so far as Kim was concerned,—and there were they made welcome, either by priest or headman, after the custom of the kindly East.

When the shadows shortened and the lama leaned more heavily upon Kim, there was always the Wheel of Life to draw forth, to hold flat under wiped stones, and with a long straw to expound cycle by cycle. Here sat the Gods on high—and they were dreams of dreams. Here was our Heaven and the world of the demi-Gods—horsemen fighting among the hills. Here were the

agonies done upon the beasts, souls ascending or descending the ladder and therefore not to be interfered with. Here were the Hells, hot and cold, and the abodes of tormented ghosts. Let the chela study the troubles that come from over-eating—bloated stomach and burning bowels. Obediently then, with bowed head and brown finger alert to follow the pointer, did the chela study; but when they came to the Human World, busy and profitless, that is just above the Hells, his mind was distracted; for by the roadside trundled the very Wheel itself, eating, drinking, trading, marrying, and quarrelling—all warmly alive. Often the lama made the living pictures the matter of his text, bidding Kim—too ready—note how the flesh takes a thousand thousand shapes, desirable or detestable as men reckon, but in truth of no account either way; and how the stupid spirit, bond-slave to the Hog, the Dove, and the Serpent—lusting after betel-nut, a new yoke of oxen, women, or the favour of kings—is bound to follow the body through all the Heavens and all the Hells, and strictly round again. Sometimes a woman or a poor man, watching the ritual—it was nothing less—when the great yellow chart was unfolded, would throw a few flowers or a handful of cowries upon its edge. It sufficed these humble ones that they had met a Holy One who might be moved to remember them in his prayers.

‘Cure them if they are sick,’ said the lama, when Kim’s sporting instincts woke. ‘Cure them if they have fever, but by no means work charms. Remember what befell the Mahratta.’

‘Then all Doing is evil?’ Kim replied, lying out under a big tree at the fork of the Doon road, watching the little ants run over his hand.

KIM

‘To abstain from action is well—except to acquire merit.’

‘At the Gates of Learning we were taught that to abstain from action was unbefitting a Sahib. And I am a Sahib.’

‘Friend of all the World,’—the lama looked directly at Kim,—‘I am an old man—pleased with shows as are children. To those who follow the Way there is neither black nor white, Hind nor Bhotiyal. We be all souls seeking escape. No matter what thy wisdom learned among Sahibs, when we come to my River thou wilt be freed from all illusion—at my side. Hai! my bones ache for that River, as they ached in the te-rain; but my spirit sits above my bones, waiting. The Search is sure!’

‘I am answered. Is it permitted to ask a question?’

The lama inclined his stately head.

‘I ate thy bread for three years—as thou knowest. Holy One, whence came—?’

‘There is much wealth, as men count it, in Bhotiyal,’ the lama returned with composure. ‘In my own place I have the illusion of honour. I ask for that I need. I am not concerned with the account. That is for my monastery. Ai! The black high seats in the monastery, and the novices all in order!’

And he told stories, tracing with a finger in the dust, of the immense and sumptuous ritual of avalanche-guarded cathedrals; of processions and devil-dances; of the changing of monks and nuns into swine; of holy cities fifteen thousand feet in the air; of intrigue between monastery and monastery; of voices among the hills, and of that mysterious mirage that dances on dry snow. He spoke even of Lhassa and of the Dalai Lama, whom he had seen and adored.

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Each long, perfect day rose behind Kim for a barrier to cut him off from his race and his mother-tongue. He slipped back to thinking and dreaming in the vernacular, and mechanically followed the lama's ceremonial observances at eating, drinking, and the like. The old man's mind turned more and more to his monastery as his eyes turned to the steadfast snows. His River troubled him nothing. Now and again, indeed, he would gaze long and long at a tuft or a twig, expecting, he said, the earth to cleave and deliver its blessing; but he was content to be with his disciple, at ease in the temperate wind that comes down from the Doon. This was not Ceylon, nor Buddh Gaya, nor Bombay, nor some grass-tangled ruins that he seemed to have stumbled upon two years ago. He spoke of those places as a scholar removed from vanity, as a Seeker walking in humility, as an old man, wise and temperate, illumining knowledge with brilliant insight. Bit by bit, disconnectedly, each tale called up by some wayside thing, he spoke of all his wanderings up and down Hind; till Kim, who had loved him without reason, now loved him for fifty good reasons. So they enjoyed themselves in high felicity, abstaining, as the Rule demands, from evil words, covetous desires; not over-eating, not lying on high beds, nor wearing rich clothes. Their stomachs told them the time, and the people brought them their food, as the saying is. They were lords of the villages of Aminabad, Sahai-gunge, Akrola of the Ford, and little Phulesa, where Kim gave the soulless woman a blessing.

But news travels fast in India, and too soon shuffled across the crop-land, bearing a basket of fruits with a box of Cabul grapes and gilt oranges, a white-whiskered servitor—a lean, dry Oorya—begging them to bring the

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honour of their presence to his mistress, distressed in her mind that the lama had neglected her so long.

‘Now do I remember’—the lama spoke as though it were a wholly new proposition. ‘She is virtuous, but an inordinate talker.’

Kim was sitting on the edge of a cow’s manger, telling stories to a village smith’s children.

‘She will only ask for another son for her daughter. I have not forgotten her,’ he said. ‘Let her acquire merit. Send word that we will come.’

They covered eleven miles through the fields in two days, and were overwhelmed with attentions at the end; for the old lady held a fine tradition of hospitality, to which she forced her son-in-law, who was under the thumb of his women-folk and bought peace by borrowing of the money-lender. Age had not weakened her tongue or her memory, and from a discreetly barred upper window, in the hearing of not less than a dozen servants, she paid Kim compliments that would have flung European audiences into unclean dismay.

‘But thou art still the shameless beggar-brat of the parao,’ she shrilled. ‘I have not forgotten thee. Wash ye and eat. The father of my daughter’s son is gone away awhile. So we poor women are dumb and useless.’

For proof, she harangued the entire household unsparingly till food and drink were brought; and in the evening—the smoke-scented evening, copper-dun and turquoise across the fields—it pleased her to order her palanquin to be set down in the untidy forecourt by smoky torch-light; and there, behind not too closely drawn curtains, she gossiped.

‘Had the Holy One come alone, I should have re-

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ceived him otherwise; but with this rogue, who can be too careful?’

‘Maharanee,’ said Kim, choosing as always the amplest title, ‘is it my fault that none other than a Sahib—a polis-sahib—called the Maharanee whose face he—’

‘Chitt! That was on the pilgrimage. When we travel—thou knowest the proverb.’

‘Called the Maharanee a Breaker of Hearts and a Dispenser of Delights?’

‘To remember that! It was true. So he did. That was in the time of the bloom of my beauty.’ She chucked like a contented parrot above the sugar lump. ‘Now tell me of thy goings and comings—as much as may be without shame. How many maids, and whose wives, hang upon thy eyelashes? Ye hail from Benares? I would have gone there again this year, but my daughter—we have only two sons. Phaii! Such is the effect of these low plains. Now in Kulu men are elephants. But I would ask thy Holy One—stand aside, rogue—a charm against most lamentable windy colics that in mango-time overtake my daughter’s eldest. Two years back he gave me a powerful spell.’

‘Oh, Holy One!’ said Kim, bubbling with mirth at the lama’s rueful face.

‘It is true. I gave her one against wind.’

‘Teeth—teeth—teeth,’ snapped the old woman.

‘Cure them when they are sick,’ Kim quoted relishingly, ‘but by no means work charms. Remember what befell the Mahratta.’

‘That was two Rains ago; she wearied me with her continual importunity.’ The lama groaned as the Unjust Judge had groaned before him. ‘Thus it comes—take note, my chela—that even those who would

follow the Way are thrust aside by idle women. Three days through, when the child was sick, she talked to me.'

'Arre! and to whom else should I talk? The boy's mother knew nothing, and the father—in the nights of the cold weather it was—"Pray to the Gods," said he, forsooth, and turning over, snored!'

'I gave her the charm. What is an old man to do?'

"To abstain from action is well—except when we acquire merit."

'Ah, chela, if thou desertest me, I am all alone.'

'He found his milk-teeth easily at any rate,' said the old lady. 'But all priests are alike.'

Kim coughed severely. Being young, he did not approve of her flippancy. 'To importune the wise out of season is to invite calamity.'

'There is a talking mynah'—the thrust came back with the well-remembered snap of the jewelled fore-finger—'over the stables which has picked up the very tone of the family-priest. Maybe I forget honour to my guests, but if ye had seen him double his fists into his belly, which was like a half-grown gourd, and cry: "Here is the pain!" ye would forgive. I am half minded to take the hakim's medicine. He sells it cheap, and certainly it makes him fat as Shiv's own bull. He does not deny remedies, but I doubted for the child because of the inauspicious colour of the bottles.'

The lama, under cover of the monologue, had faded out into the darkness towards the room prepared.

'Thou hast angered him, belike,' said Kim.

'Not he. He is wearied, and I forgot, being a grandmother. (None but a grandmother should ever oversee a child. Mothers are only fit for bearing.) To-morrow, when he sees how my daughter's son is grown, he will

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write the charm. Then, too, he can judge of the new hakim's drugs.'

'Who is the hakim, Maharanee?'

'A wanderer, as thou art, but a most sober Bengali from Dacca—a master of medicine. He relieved me of an oppression after meat by means of a small pill that wrought like a devil unchained. He travels about now, vending preparations of great value. He has even papers, printed in Angrezi, telling what things he has done for weak-backed men and slack women. He has been here four days; but hearing ye were coming (hakims and priests are snake and tiger the world over) he has, as I take it, gone to cover.'

While she drew breath after this volley, the ancient servant, sitting unrebuked on the edge of the torch-light, muttered: 'This house is a cattle-pound, as it were, for all charlatans and—priests. Let the boy stop eating mangoes . . . but who can argue with a grandmother?' He raised his voice respectfully: 'Sahiba, the hakim sleeps after his meat. He is in the quarters behind the dovecot.'

Kim bristled like an expectant terrier. To outface and down-talk a Calcutta-taught Bengali, a voluble Dacca drug-vendor, would be a good game. It was not seemly that the lama, and incidentally himself, should be thrown aside for such an one. He knew those curious bastard English advertisements at the backs of native newspapers. St. Xavier's boys sometimes brought them in by stealth to snigger over among their mates; for the language of the grateful patient recounting his symptoms is most simple and revealing. The Oorya, not unanxious to play off one parasite against the other, slunk away towards the dovecot.

KIM

‘Yes,’ said Kim, with measured scorn. ‘Their stock-in-trade is a little coloured water and a very great shamelessness. Their prey are broken-down kings and overfed Bengalis. Their profit is in children—who are not born.’

The old lady chuckled. ‘Do not be envious. Charms are better, eh? I never gainsaid it. See that thy Holy One writes me a good amulet by the morning.’

‘None but the ignorant deny’—a thick, heavy voice boomed through the darkness, as a figure came to rest squatting—‘None but the ignorant deny the value of charms. None but the ignorant deny the value of medicines.’

‘A rat found a piece of turmeric. Said he: “I will open a grocer’s shop,”’ Kim retorted.

Battle was fairly joined now, and they heard the old lady stiffen to attention.

‘The priest’s son knows the names of his nurse and three Gods. Says he: “Hear me, or I will curse you by the three million Great Ones.”’ Decidedly this invisible had an arrow or two in his quiver. He went on: ‘I am but a teacher of the alphabet. I have learned all the wisdom of the Sahibs.’

‘The Sahibs never grow old. They dance and they play like children when they are grandfathers. A strong-backed breed,’ piped the voice inside the palanquin.

‘I have, too, our drugs which loosen humours of the head in hot and angry men. Sina well compounded when the moon stands in the proper House; yellow earths I have—arplan from China that makes a man to renew his youth and astonish his household; saffron from Kashmir, and the best salep of Cabul. Many people have died before—’

KIM

‘That I surely believe,’ said Kim.

‘They knew the value of my drugs. I do not give my sick the mere ink in which a charm is written, but hot and rending drugs which descend and wrestle with the evil.’

‘Very mightily they do so,’ sighed the old lady.

The voice launched into an immense tale of misfortune and bankruptcy, studded with plentiful petitions to the Government. ‘But for my fate, which overrules all, I had been now in Government employ. I bear a degree from the great school at Calcutta—whither, maybe, the son of this house shall go.’

‘He shall indeed. If our neighbour’s brat can in a few years be made an F. A.’ (First Arts—she used the English word, of which she had heard so often), ‘how much more shall children clever as some that I know bear away prizes at rich Calcutta.’

‘Never,’ said the voice, ‘have I seen such a child! Born in an auspicious hour, and--but for that colic which, alas! turning into black cholers, may carry him off like a pigeon—destined to many years, he is enviable.’

‘Hai mai!’ said the old lady. ‘To praise children is inauspicious, or I could listen to this talk. But the back of the house is unguarded, and even in this soft air men think themselves to be men and women we know. . . . The child’s father is away too, and I must be chowkedar (watchman) in my old age. Up! Up! Take up the palanquin. Let the hakim and the young priest settle between them whether charms or medicine most avail. Ho! worthless people, fetch tobacco for the guests, and—round the homestead go I!’

The palanquin reeled off, followed by straggling torches and a horde of dogs. Twenty villages knew the

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Sahiba—her failings, her tongue, and her large charity. Twenty villages cheated her after immemorial custom, but no man would have stolen or robbed within her jurisdiction for any gift under Heaven. None the less, she made great parade of her formal inspections, the riot of which could be heard half-way to Mussoorie.

Kim relaxed, as one augur must when he meets another. The hakim, still squatting, slid over his hookah with a friendly foot, and Kim pulled at the good weed. The hangers-on expected grave professional debate, and perhaps a little free doctoring.

'To discuss medicine before the ignorant is of one piece with teaching the peacock to sing,' said the hakim.

'True courtesy,' Kim echoed, 'is very often inattention.'

These, be it understood, were company-manners, designed to impress.

'Hi! I have an ulcer on my leg,' cried a scullion. 'Look at it!'

'Get hence! Remove!' said the hakim. 'Is it the habit of the place to pester honoured guests? Ye crowd in like buffaloes.'

'If the Sahiba knew—' Kim began.

'Ai! Ai! Come away. They are meat for our mistress. When her young Shaitan's colics are cured perhaps we poor people may be suffered to—'

'The mistress fed thy wife when thou wast in jail for breaking the money-lender's head. Who speaks against her?' The old servitor curled his white moustaches savagely in the young moonlight. 'I am responsible for the honour of this house. Go!' and he drove the underlings before him.

Said the hakim, hardly more than shaping the words

KIM

with his lips: 'How do you do, Mr. O'Hara? I am jolly glad to see you again.'

Kim's hand clenched about the pipe-stem. Anywhere on the open road, perhaps, he would not have been astonished; but here, in this quiet backwater of life, he was not prepared for Hurree Babu. It annoyed him, too, that he had been hoodwinked.

'Ah ha! I told you at Lucknow—resurgam—I shall rise again and you shall not know me. How much did you bet—eh?'

He chewed leisurely upon a few cardamom seeds, but he breathed uneasily.

'But why come here, Babuji?'

'Ah! Thatt is the question, as Shakespeare hath said. I come to congratulate you on your extraordinary effeecient performance at Delhi. Oah! I tell you we are all proud of you. It was verree neat and handy. Our mutual friend, he is old friend of mine. He has been in some dam-tight places. Now he will be in some more. He told me; I tell Mr. Lurgan; and he is pleased you graduate so nicely. All the Department is pleased.'

For the first time in his life, Kim thrilled to the clean pride (it can be a deadly pitfall, none the less) of Departmental praise—ensnaring praise from an equal of work appreciated by fellow-workers. Earth has nothing on the same plane to compare with it. But, cried the Oriental in him, Babus do not travel far to retail compliments.

'Tell thy tale, Babu,' he said authoritatively.

'Oah, it is nothing. Onlee I was at Simla when the wire came in about what our mutual friend said he had hidden, and old Creighton—' He looked to see how Kim would take this piece of audacity.

KIM

‘The Colonel Sahib,’ the boy from St. Xavier’s corrected.

‘Of course. He found me at a loose string, and I had to go down to Chitor to find that beastly letter. I do not like the South—too much railway travel; but I drew good travelling allowance. Ha! Ha! I meet our mutual at Delhi on the way back. He lies quiett just now, and says Saddhu-disguise suits him to the ground. Well, there I hear what you have done so well, so quickly, upon the instantaneous spur of the moment. I tell our mutual friend you take the bally bun, by Jove! It was splendid. I come to tell you so.’

‘Umm!’

The frogs were busy in the ditches, and the moon slid to her setting. Some happy servant had gone out to commune with the night and to beat upon a drum. Kim’s next sentence was in the vernacular.

‘How didst thou follow us?’

‘Oah. Thatt was nothing. I know from our mutual friend you go to Saharunpore. So I come on. Red lamas are not inconspicuous persons. I buy myself my drug-box, and I am very good doctor really. I go to Akrola by the Ford, and hear all about you, and I talk here and talk there. All the common people know what you do. I know when the hospitable old lady sent the dooli. They have great recollections of the old lama’s visits here. I know old ladies cannot keep their hands from medicines. So I am a doctor, and—you hear my talk? I think it is verree good. My word, Mister O’Hara, they know about you and the lama for fifty miles—the common people. So I come. Do you mind?’

‘Babuji,’ said Kim, looking up at the broad, grinning face, ‘I am a Sahib.’

KIM

‘My dear Mister O’Hara—’

‘And I hope to play the Great Game.’

‘You are subordinate to me departmentally at present.’

‘Then why talk like an ape up in a tree? Men do not come after one from Simla and change their dress, for the sake of a few sweet words. I am not a child. Talk Hindi and let us get to the yolk of the egg. Thou art here—speaking not one word of truth in ten. Why art thou here? Give a straight answer.’

‘That is so verree disconcerting of the European, Mister O’Hara. You should know a heap better at your time of life.’

‘But I want to know,’ said Kim, laughing. ‘If it is the Game, I may help. How can I do anything if you bukh (babble) all round the shop.’

Hurree Babu reached for the pipe, and sucked it till it guggled again.

‘Now I will speak vernacular. You sit tight, Mister O’Hara. It concerns the pedigree of a white stallion.’

‘Still? That was finished long ago.’

‘When every one is dead the Great Game is finished. Not before. Listen to me till the end. There were Five Kings who prepared a sudden war three years ago, when thou wast given the stallion’s pedigree by Mahbub Ali. Upon them, because of that news, and ere they were ready, fell our Army.’

‘Ay—eight thousand men with guns. I remember that night.’

‘But the war was not pushed. That is the Government custom. The troops were recalled because the Government believed the Five Kings were cowed; and

it is not cheap to feed men among the high Passes. Hilas and Bunar—Rajahs with guns—undertook for a price to guard the passes against all coming from the North. They protested both fear and friendship.' He broke off with a giggle into English: 'Of course, I tell you this unoffeicially to elucidate political situation, Mister O'Hara. Offeicially, I am debarred from criticising any action of superior. Now I go on.—This pleased the Government, anxious to avoid expense, and a bond was made for so many rupees a month that Hilas and Bunar should guard the Passes as soon as the State's troops were withdrawn. At that time—it was after we two met—I, who had been selling tea in Leh, became a clerk of accounts in the Army. When the troops were withdrawn, I was left behind to pay the coolies who made new roads in the Hills. This road-making was part of the bond between Bunar, Hilas, and the Government.'

'So; and then?'

'I tell you, it was jolly beastly cold up there too, after summer,' said Hurree Babu confidentially. 'I was afraid these Bunar men would cut my throat every night for thee pay-chest. My native sepoy-guard, they laughed at me! By Jove! I was such a fearful man! Nevar mind thatt. I go on colloquially. . . . I send word many times that these two Kings were sold to the North; and Mahbub Ali, who was yet farther north, amply confirmed it. Nothing was done. Only my feet were frozen, and a toe dropped off. I sent word that the roads for which I was paying money to the diggers were being made for the feet of strangers and enemies.'

'For?'

'For the Russians. The thing was an open jest

among the coolies. Then I was called down to tell what I knew by speech of tongue. Mahbub came South too. See the end! Over the Passes this year after snow-melting—he shivered afresh—‘come two strangers under cover of shooting wild goats. They bear guns, but they bear also chains and levels and compasses.’

‘Oho! The thing gets clearer.’

‘They are well received by Hilas and Bunar. They make great promises; they speak as the mouthpiece of a Kaisar with gifts. Up the valleys, down the valleys go they, saying, “Here is a place to build a breastwork; here can ye pitch a fort. Here can ye hold the road against an army”—the very roads for which I paid out the rupees monthly. The Government knows, but does nothing. The three other Kings, who were not paid for guarding the passes, tell them by runner of the bad faith of Bunar and Hilas. When all the evil is done, look you—when these two strangers with the levels and the compasses make the Five Kings to believe that a great army will sweep the Passes to-morrow or the next day—Hill-people are all fools—comes the order to me, Hurree Babu, “Go North and see what those strangers do.” I say to Creighton Sahib, “This is not a lawsuit, that we go about to collect evidence.”’ Hurree returned to his English with a jerk: ‘“By Jove,” I said, “why the dooce do you not issue demi-offeeicial orders to some brave man to poison them, for an example? It is, if you permit the observation, most reprehensible laxity on your part.”’ And Colonel Creighton, he laughed at me! It is all your beastly English pride. You think no one dare conspire! That is all tommy-rott.’

Kim smoked slowly, revolving the business, so far as he understood it, in his quick mind.

‘Then thou goest forth to follow the strangers?’

‘No; to meet them. They are coming in to Simla to send down their horns and heads to be dressed at Calcutta. They are exclusively sporting gentlemen, and they are allowed special facelities by the Government. Of course, we always do that. It is our British pride.’

‘Then what is to fear from them?’

‘By Jove, they are not black people. I can do all sorts of things with black people, of course. They are Russians, and highly unscrupulous people. I—I do not want to consort with them without a witness.’

‘Will they kill thee?’

‘Oah, thatt is nothing. I am good enough Herbert Spencerian, I trust, to meet little thing like death, which is all in my fate, you know. But—but they may beat me.’

‘Why?’

Hurree Babu snapped his fingers with irritation. ‘Of course I shall affeeliate myself to their camp in supernumerary capacity as perhaps interpreter, or person mentally impotent and hungree, or some such thing. And then I must pick up what I can, I suppose. That is as easy for me as playing Mister Doctor to the old lady. Onlee—onlee—you see, Mister O’Hara, I am unfortunately Asiatic, which is serious detriment in some respects. And all-so I am Bengali—a fearful man.’

‘God made the Hare and the Bengali. What shame?’ said Kim, quoting the proverb.

‘It was process of Evolution, I think, from Primal Necessity, but the fact remains in all its cui bono. I am, oh, awfully fearful!—I remember once they wanted to cut off my head on the road to Lhassa. (No, I have

KIM

never reached to Lhassa.) I sat down and cried, Mister O'Hara, anticipating Chinese tortures. I do not suppose these two gentlemen will torture me, but I like to provide for possible contingency with European assistance in emergency.' He coughed and spat out his cardamoms. 'It is purely unoffeicial indent, to which you can say, "No, Babu." If you have no pressing engagement with your old man—perhaps you might divert him; perhaps I can seduce his fancies—I should like you to keep in Departmental touch with me till I find those sporting coves. I have great opeenion of you since I met my friend at Delhi. And also I will embody your name in my offeicial report when matter is finally adjudicated. It will be a great feather in your cap. That is why I come really.'

'Humph! The end of the tale, I think, is true; but what of the fore-part?'

'About the Five Kings? Oah! there is ever so much truth in it. A lots more than you would suppose,' said Hurree earnestly. 'You come—eh? I go from here straight into the Doon. It is verree verdant and painted meads. I shall go to Mussoorie—to good old Mussoorie Pahar, as the gentlemen and ladies say. Then by Rampur into Chini. That is the only way they can come. I do not like waiting in the cold, but we must wait for them. I want to walk with them to Simla. You see, one Russian is a Frenchman, and I know my French pretty well. I have friends in Chandernagore.'

'He would certainly rejoice to see the Hills again,' said Kim meditatively. 'All his speech these ten days past has been of little else. If we go together—'

'Oah! We can be quite strangers on the road, if your lama prefers. I shall just be four or five miles ahead.

KIM

There is no hurry for Hurree—that is an Europe pun, ha! ha!—and you come after. There is plenty of time; they will plot and survey and map of course. I shall go to-morrow, and you the next day, if you choose. Eh? You go think on it till morning. By Jove, it is near morning now.' He yawned ponderously, and with never a civil word lumbered off to his sleeping-place. But Kim slept little, and his thoughts ran in Hindustanee:

'Well is the Game called great! I was four days a scullion at Quetta, waiting on the wife of the man whose book I stole. And that was part of the Great Game! From the South—God knows how far—came up the Mahratta, playing the Great Game in fear of his life. Now I shall go far and far into the North playing the Great Game. Truly, it runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind. And my share and my joy'—he smiled to the darkness—'I owe to the lama here. Also to Mahbub Ali—also to Creighton Sahib, but chiefly to the Holy One. He is right—a great and a wonderful world—and I am Kim—Kim—Kim—alone—one person—in the middle of it all. But I will see these strangers with their levels and chains . . . '

'What was the upshot of last night's babble?' said the lama, after his orisons.

'There came a strolling seller of drugs—a hanger-on of the Sahiba's. Him I abolished by arguments and prayers, proving that our charms are worthier than his coloured waters.'

'Alas! my charms. Is the virtuous woman still bent upon a new one?'

'Very strictly.'

'Then it must be written, or she will deafen me with her clamour.' He fumbled at his pencase.

KIM

'In the Plains,' said Kim, 'are always too many people. In the Hills, as I understand, there are fewer.'

'Oh! the Hills, and the snow upon the Hills.' The lama tore off a tiny square of paper fit to go in an amulet. 'But what dost thou know of the Hills?'

'They are very close.' Kim thrust open the door and looked at the long, peaceful line of the Himalayas flushed in morning-gold. 'Except in the dress of a Sahib, I have never set foot among them.'

The lama snuffed the wind wistfully.

'If we go north,'—Kim put the question to the waking sunrise,—'would not much mid-day heat be avoided by walking among the lower hills at least? . . . Is the charm made, Holy One?'

'I have written the names of seven silly devils—not one of whom is worth a grain of dust in the eye. Thus do foolish women drag us from the Way!'

Hurree Babu come out from behind the dovecot, washing his teeth with ostentatious ritual. Full-fleshed, heavy-hunched, bull-necked, and deep-voiced, he did not look like 'a fearful man.' Kim signed almost imperceptibly that matters were in good train, and when the morning toilet was over Hurree Babu, in flowery speech, came to do honour to the lama. They ate, of course, apart, and afterwards the old lady, more or less veiled behind a window, returned to the vital business of green-mango colics in the young. The lama's knowledge of medicine was of course sympathetic only. He believed that the dung of a black horse, mixed with sulphur, and carried in a snake-skin, was a sound remedy for cholera; but the symbolism interested him far more than the science. Hurree Babu deferred to these views with enchanting politeness, so that the lama called him

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a courteous physician. Hurree Babu replied that he was no more than an inexpert dabbler in the mysteries; but at least—he thanked the Gods therefor—he knew when he sat in the presence of a master. He himself had been taught by the Sahibs, who do not consider expense, in the lordly halls of Calcutta; but, as he was ever first to acknowledge, there lay a wisdom behind earthly wisdom—the high and lonely lore of meditation. Kim looked on with envy. The Hurree Babu of his knowledge—oily, effusive, and nervous—was gone; gone too was the brazen drug-vendor of overnight. There remained—polished, polite, attentive—a sober, learned son of experience and adversity, gathering wisdom from the lama's lips. The old lady confided to Kim that these rare levels were beyond her. She liked charms with plenty of ink that one could wash off in water, swallow, and be done with. Else what was the use of the Gods? She liked men and women, and she spoke of them—of kinglets she had known in the past; of her own youth and beauty; of the depredations of leopards and the eccentricities of love Asiatic; of the incidence of taxation, rack-renting, funeral ceremonies, her son-in-law (this by allusion, easy to be followed), the care of the young, and the age's lack of decency. And Kim, as interested in the life of this world as she soon to leave it, squatted with his feet under the hem of his robe, drinking all in, while the lama demolished one after another every theory of body-curing put forward by Hurree Babu.

At noon the Babu strapped up his brass-bound drug-box, took his patent-leather shoes of ceremony in one hand, a gay blue and white umbrella in the other, and set off northwards to the Doon, where, he said, he was in demand among the lesser kings of those parts.

'We will go in the cool of the evening, chela,' said the lama. 'That doctor, learned in physic and courtesy, affirms that the people among these lower hills are devout, generous, and much in need of a teacher. In a very short time—so says the hakim—we come to cool air and the smell of pines.'

'Ye go to the Hills. And by Kulu-road? Oh, thrice happy!' shrilled the old lady. 'But that I am a little pressed with the care of the homestead I would take palanquin . . . but that would be shameless, and my reputation would be cracked. Ho! Ho! I know the road—every march of the road I know. Ye will find charity throughout—it is not denied to the well-looking. I will give orders for provision. A servant to set you forth upon your journey? No. . . . Then I will at least cook ye good food.'

'What a woman is the Sahiba!' said the white-bearded Oorya, when a tumult rose by the kitchen quarters. 'She has never forgotten a friend: she has never forgotten an enemy in all her years. And her cookery —wah!' He rubbed his slim stomach.

There were cakes, there were sweetmeats, there was cold fowl stewed to rags with rice and prunes—enough to burden Kim like a mule.

'I am old and useless,' she said. 'None now love me—and none respect—but there are few to compare with me when I call on the Gods and squat to my cooking-pots. Come again, O people of good will! Holy One and disciple, come again! The room is always prepared; the welcome is always ready. . . . See the women do not follow thy chela too openly. I know the women of Kulu. Take heed, chela, lest he run away when he smells his Hills again. . . . Hai! Do not tilt the

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rice-bag upside down. . . . Bless the household, Holy One, and forgive thy servant her stupidities.'

She wiped her red old eyes on a corner of her veil, and clucked throatily.

'Women talk,' said the lama at last, 'but that is a woman's infirmity. I gave her a charm. She is upon the Wheel and wholly given over to the shows of this life, but none the less, chela, she is virtuous, kindly, hospitable—of a whole and zealous heart. Who shall say she does not acquire merit?'

'Not I, Holy One,' said Kim, reslinging the bountiful provision on his shoulders. 'In my mind—behind my eyes—I have tried to picture such an one altogether freed from the Wheel—desiring nothing, causing nothing—a nun, as it were.'

'And, O imp?' The lama almost laughed aloud.

'I cannot make the picture.'

'Nor I. But there are many, many millions of lives before her. She will get wisdom a little, it may be, in each one.'

'And will she forget how to make stews with saffron upon that road?'

'Thy mind is set on things unworthy. But she has skill. I am refreshed all over. When we reach the lower hills I shall be yet stronger. The hakim spoke truly to me this morn when he said a breath from the snows blows away twenty years from the life of a man. We will go up into the Hills—the high hills—up to the sound of snow-water and the sound of the trees—for a little while. The hakim said that at any time we may return to the Plains, for we do no more than skirt the pleasant places. The hakim is full of learning; but he is in no way proud. I spoke to him—when thou wast

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talking to the Sahiba—of a certain dizziness that lays hold upon the back of my neck in the night, and he said it rose from excessive heat—to be cured by cool air. Upon consideration, I marvelled that I had not thought of such a simple remedy.'

'Didst thou tell him of thy Search?' said Kim, a little jealously. He preferred to sway the lama by his own speech—not through the wiles of Hurree Babu.

'Assuredly. I told him of my dream, and of the manner by which I had acquired merit by causing thee to be taught wisdom.'

'Thou didst not say I was a Sahib?'

'What need? I have told thee many times we be but two souls seeking escape. He said—and he is just herein—that the River of Healing will break forth even as I dreamed—at my feet if need be. Having found the Way, seest thou, that shall free me from the Wheel, need I trouble to find a way about the mere fields of earth—which are illusion? That were senseless. I have my dreams, night upon night repeated; I have the "Jataka"; and I have thee, Friend of all the World. It was written in thy horoscope that a Red Bull on a green field—I have not forgotten—should bring thee to honour. Who but I saw that prophecy accomplished? Indeed, I was the instrument. Thou shalt find me my River, being in return the instrument. The Search is sure!'

He set his ivory-yellow face, serene and untroubled, towards the beckoning Hills; his shadow shouldering far before him in the dust.

CHAPTER XIII

‘Who hath desired the Sea—the immense and contumacious surges?

The shudder, the stumble, the swerve ere the star-stabbing bowsprit emerges—

The orderly clouds of the Trades and the ridged roaring sapphire thereunder—

Unheralded cliff-lurking flaws and the head-sails’ low-volleying thunder?

His Sea in no wonder the same—his Sea and the same in each wonder—

His Sea that his being fulfils?

So and no otherwise—so and no otherwise Hill-men desire their Hills!’

‘WHO goes to the Hills goes to his mother.’

They had crossed the Sewaliks and the half-tropical Doon, left Mussoorie behind them, and headed north along the narrow hill-roads. Day after day they struck deeper into the huddled mountains, and day after day Kim watched the lama return to a man’s strength. Among the terraces of the Doon he had leaned on the boy’s shoulder, ready to profit by wayside halts. Under the great ramp to Mussoorie he drew himself together as an old hunter faces a well-remembered bank, and where he should have sunk exhausted swung his long draperies about him, drew a deep double-lungful

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of the diamond air, and walked as only a hillman can. Kim, plains-bred and plains-fed, sweated and panted astonished. ‘This is my country,’ said the lama. ‘Beside Suchzen, this is flatter than a rice-field’; and with steady, driving strokes from the loins he strode upwards. But it was on the steep downhill marches, three thousand feet in three hours, that he went utterly away from Kim, whose back ached with holding back, and whose big toe was nigh cut off by his grass sandal-string. Through the speckled shadow of the great deodar-forests; through oak feathered and plumed with ferns; birch, ilex, rhododendron, and pine, out on to the bare hillsides’ slippery sunburnt grass, and back into the woodlands’ coolth again, till oak gave way to bamboo and palm of the valley, the lama swung untiring.

Glancing back in the twilight at the huge ridges behind him and the faint, thin line of the road whereby they had come, he would lay out, with a hillman’s generous breadth of vision, fresh marches for the morrow; or, halting in the neck of some uplifted pass that gave on Spiti and Kulu, would stretch out his hands yearningly towards the high snows of the horizon. In the dawns they flared windy-red above stark blue, as Kedarnath and Badrinath—kings of that wilderness—took the first sunlight. All day long they lay like molten silver under the sun, and at evening put on their jewels again. At first they breathed temperately upon the travellers, winds good to meet when one crawled over some gigantic hogback; but in a few days, at a height of nine or ten thousand feet, those breezes bit; and Kim kindly allowed a village of hillmen to acquire merit by giving him a rough blanket-coat. The lama was mildly surprised that any one should object to the

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knife-edged breezes which had cut the years off his shoulders.

‘These are but the lower hills, chela. There is no cold till we come to the true Hills.’

‘Air and water are good, and the people are devout enough, but the food is very bad,’ Kim growled; ‘and we walk as though we were mad—or English. It freezes at night, too.’

‘A little, maybe; but only enough to make old bones rejoice in the sun. We must not always delight in the soft beds and rich food.’

‘We might at the least keep to the road.’

Kim had all a plains-man’s affection for the well-trodden track, not six feet wide, that snaked among the mountains; but the lama, being Tibetan, could not refrain from short cuts over spurs and the rims of gravel-strewn slopes. As he explained to his limping disciple, a man bred among mountains can prophesy the course of a mountain-road, and though low-lying clouds might be a hindrance to a short-cutting stranger, they made no earthly difference to a thoughtful man. Thus, after long hours of what would be reckoned very fair mountaineering in civilised countries, they would pant over a saddle-back, sidle past a few landslips, and drop through forest at an angle of forty-five on to the road again. Along their track lay the villages of the hill-folk—mud and earth huts, the timbers now and then rudely carved with an axe—clinging like swallows’ nests against the steeps, huddled on tiny flats half-way down a three-thousand-foot glissade; jammed into a corner between cliffs that funnelled and focused every wandering blast; or, for the sake of summer pasture, cowering down on a neck that in winter would be ten feet deep in snow.

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And the people—the sallow, greasy, duffle-clad people, with short bare legs and faces almost Esquimaux—would flock out and adore. The Plains—kindly and gentle—had treated the lama as a holy man among holy men. But the Hills worshipped him as one in the confidence of all the devils. Theirs was an almost obliterated Buddhism, overlaid with a nature-worship fantastic as their own landscapes, elaborate as the terracing of their tiny fields; but they recognised the big hat, the clicking rosary, and the rare Chinese texts for great authority; and they respected the man under the hat.

‘We saw thee come down over the black Breasts of Eua,’ said a Betah who gave them cheese, sour milk, and stone-hard bread one evening. ‘We do not use that often—except when calving cows stray in summer. There is a sudden wind among those stones that casts men down on the stillest day. But what should such folk care for the Devil of Eua!?’

Then did Kim, aching in every fibre, dizzy with looking down, footsore with cramping desperate toes into inadequate crannies, take joy in the day’s march—such joy as a boy of St. Xavier’s who had won the quarter-mile on the flat might take in the praises of his friends. The hills sweated the ghi and sugar suet off his bones; the dry air, taken sobbingly at the head of cruel passes, firmed and built out his upper ribs; and tilted levels put new hard muscles into calf and thigh.

They meditated often on the Wheel of Life—the more so since, as the lama said, they were freed from its visible temptations. Except the gray eagle and an occasional far-seen bear grubbing and rooting on the hillside, the vision of a furious painted leopard met at dawn in a still valley devouring a goat, and now and again a

bright-coloured bird, they were alone with the winds and the grass singing under the wind. The women of the smoky huts over whose roofs the two walked as they descended the mountains, were unlovely and unclean, wives of many husbands, and afflicted with goitre. The men were wood-cutters when they were not farmers —meek, and of an incredible simplicity. But that suitable discourse might not fail, Fate sent them, overtaking and overtaken upon the road, the courteous Dacea physician, who paid for his food in ointments good for goitre and counsels that restore peace between men and women. He seemed to know these hills as well as he knew the hill dialects, and gave the lama the lie of the land towards Ladakh and Tibet. He said they could return to the Plains at any moment. Meantime, for such as loved mountains, yonder road might amuse. This was not all revealed in a breath, but at evening encounters on the stone threshing-floors, when, patients disposed of, the doctor would smoke and the lama snuff, while Kim watched the wee cows grazing on the house-tops, or threw his soul after his eye across the deep blue gulfs between range and range. And there were talks apart in the dark woods, when the doctor would seek herbs, and Kim, as budding physician, must accompany him.

‘You see, Mister O’Hara, I do not know what the deuce-an’-all I shall do when I find our sporting friends; but if you will kindly keep within sight of my umbrella, which is fine fixed point for cadastral survey, I feel much better.’

Kim looked out across the jungle of peaks. ‘This is not my country, hakim. Easier, I think, to find one louse in a bearskin.’

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‘Oah, thatt is my strong points. There is no hurry for Hurree. They were at Leh not so long ago. They said they had come down from the Kara Korum with their heads and horns and all. I am onlee afraid they will have sent back all their letters and compromising things from Leh into Russian territorree. Of course they will walk away as far to the East as possible—just to show that they were never among the Western States. You do not know the Hills?’ He scratched with a twig on the earth. ‘Look! They should have come in by Srinagar or Abbottabad. Thatt is their short road—down the river by Bunji and Astor. But they have made mischief in the West. So’—he drew a furrow from left to right—‘they march and they march away East to Leh (ah! it is cold there), and down the Indus to Han-le (I know that road), and then down, you see, to Bushahr and Chini valley. That is ascertained by process of elimination, and also by asking questions from people that I cure so well. Our friends have been a long time playing about and producing impressions. So they are well known from far off. You will see me catch them somewhere in Chini valley. Please keep your eye on the umbrella.’

It nodded like a wind-blown harebell down the valleys and round the mountain sides, and in due time the lama and Kim, who steered by compass, would overhaul it, vending ointments and powders at eventide. ‘We came by such and such a way!’ The lama would throw a careless finger backward at the ridges, and the umbrella would expend itself in compliments.

They crossed a snowy pass in cold moonlight, when the lama, mildly chaffing Kim, went through up to his knees, like a Bactrian camel—the snow-bred, shag-

haired sort that come into the Kashmir Serai. They dipped across beds of light snow and snow-powdered shale, where they took refuge from a gale in a camp of Tibetans hurrying down tiny sheep, each laden with a bag of borax. They came out upon grassy shoulders still snow-speckled, and through forest, to grass anew. For all their marchings, Kedarnath and Badrinath were not impressed; and it was only after days of travel that Kim, uplifted upon some insignificant ten-thousand-foot hummock, could see that a shoulder-knot or horn of the two great lords had—ever so slightly—changed outline.

At last they entered a world within a world—a valley of leagues where the high hills were fashioned of the mere rubble and refuse from off the knees of the mountains. Here one day's march carried them no farther, it seemed, than a dreamer's clogged pace bears him in a nightmare. They skirted a shoulder painfully for hours, and, behold, it was but an outlying boss in an outlying buttress of the main pile! A rounded meadow revealed itself, when they had reached it, for a vast tableland running far into the valley. Three days later, it was a dim fold in the earth to southward.

'Surely the Gods live here,' said Kim, beaten down by the silence and the appalling sweep and dispersal of the cloud-shadows after rain. 'This is no place for men!'

'Long and long ago,' said the lama, as to himself, 'it was asked of the Lord whether the world were everlasting. . . . When I was in Ceylon, a wise Seeker confirmed that from the gospel which is written in Pali. Certainly, since we know the way to Freedom, the question were unprofitable, but—look, and know illusion, chela! These

are the true Hills! They are like my hills by Suchzen. Never were such hills!"

Above them, still enormously above them, earth towered away towards the snow-line, where from east to west across hundreds of miles, ruled as with a ruler, the last of the bold birches stopped. Above that, in scarps and blocks upheaved, the rocks strove to fight their heads above the white smother. Above these again, changeless since the world's beginning, but changing to every mood of sun and cloud, lay out the eternal snow. They could see blots and blurs on its face where storm and wandering wullie-wa got up to dance. Below them, as they stood, the forest slid away in a sheet of blue-green for mile upon mile; below the forest was a village in its sprinkle of terraced fields and steep grazing-grounds; below the village they knew, though a thunder-storm worried and growled there for the moment, a pitch of twelve or fifteen hundred feet gave to the moist valley where the streams gather that are the mothers of young Sutluj.

As usual, the lama had led Kim by cow-track and by-road, far from the main route along which Hurree Babu, that 'fearful man,' had bucketed three days before through a storm to which nine Englishmen out of ten would have given full right of way. Hurree was no game-shot,—the snick of a trigger made him change colour,—but, as he himself would have said, he was 'fairly efficient stalker,' and he had raked the huge valley with a pair of cheap binoculars to some purpose. Moreover, the white of worn canvas tents against green carries far. Hurree Babu had seen all he wanted to see when he sat on the threshing-floor of Ziglaur, twenty miles away as the eagle flies, and forty by road—that is

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to say, two small dots which one day were just below the snow-line, and the next had moved downward perhaps six inches on the hillside. Once cleaned out and set to the work, his fat bare legs could cover a surprising amount of ground, and this was the reason why, while Kim and the lama lay in a leaky hut at Ziglaur till the storm should be overpassed, an oily, wet, but always smiling Bengali, talking the best of English with the vilest of phrases, was ingratiating himself with two sodden and rather rheumatic foreigners. He had arrived, revolving many wild schemes, on the heels of a thunderstorm which had split a pine over against their camp, and so convinced a dozen or two forcibly impressed baggage-coolies the day was inauspicious for farther travel that with one accord they had thrown down their loads and jibbed. They were subjects of a Hill-Rajah who farmed out their services, as is the custom, for his private gain; and, to add to their personal distresses, the strange Sahibs had already threatened them with rifles. The most of them knew rifles and Sahibs of old: they were trackers and shikarris of the Northern valleys, keen after bear and wild goat; but they had never been thus treated in their lives. So the forest took them to her bosom, and, for all oaths and clamour, refused to restore. There was no need to feign madness or—the Babu had thought of another means of securing a welcome. He wrung out his wet clothes, slipped on his patent-leather shoes, opened the blue and white umbrella, and with mincing gait and a heart beating against his tonsils appeared as ‘agent for His Royal Highness, the Rajah of Rampur, gentlemen. What can I do for you, please?’

The gentlemen were delighted. One was visibly

French, the other Russian, but they spoke English not much inferior to the Babu's. They begged his kind offices. Their native servants had gone sick at Leh. They had hurried on because they were anxious to bring the spoils of the chase to Simla ere the skins grew moth-eaten. They bore a general letter of introduction (the Babu salaamed to it orientally) to all Government officials. No, they had not met any other shooting-parties en route. They did for themselves. They had plenty of supplies. They only wished to push on as soon as might be. At this he waylaid a cowering hillman among the trees, and after three minutes' talk and a little silver (one cannot be economical upon State service, though Hurree's heart bled at the waste) the eleven coolies and the three hangers-on reappeared. At least the Babu would be a witness to oppression.

'My royal master, he will be much annoyed, but these people are onlee common people and grossly ignorant. If your honours will kindly overlook unfortunate affair. I shall be much pleased. In a little while rain will stop and we can then proceed. You have been shooting, eh? That is fine performance!'

He skipped nimbly from one kilta to the next, making pretence to adjust each conical basket. The Englishman is not, as a rule, familiar with the Asiatic, but he would not strike across the wrist a kindly Babu who had accidentally upset a kilta with a red oilskin top. On the other hand, he would not press drink upon a Babu were he never so friendly, nor would he invite him to meat. The strangers did all these things, and asked many questions,—about women mostly,—to which Hurree returned gay and unstudied answers. They gave him a glass of whitish fluid like to gin, and then

more; and in a little time his gravity departed from him. He became thickly treasonous, and spoke in terms of sweeping indecency of a Government which had forced upon him a white man's education and neglected to supply him with a white man's salary. He babbled tales of oppression and wrong till the tears ran down his cheeks for the miseries of his land. Then he staggered off, singing love-songs of Lower Bengal, and collapsed upon a wet tree-trunk. Never was so unfortunate a product of English rule in India more unhappily thrust upon aliens.

'They are all just of that pattern,' said one sportsman to the other in French. 'When we get into India proper thou wilt see. I should like to visit his Rajah. One might speak the good word there. It is possible that he has heard of us and wishes to signify his goodwill.'

'We have not time. We must get into Simla as soon as may be,' his companion replied. 'For my own part, I wish our reports had been sent back from Hilas, or even Leh.'

'The English post is better and safer. Remember we are given all facilities—and name of God!—they give them to us too! Is it unbelievable stupidity?'

'It is pride—pride that deserves and will receive punishment.'

'Yes! To fight a fellow-Continental in our game is something. There is a risk attached, but these people —bah! It is too easy.'

'Pride—all pride, my friend.'

'Now what the deuce is good of Chandernagore being so close to Calcutta and all,' said Hurree, snoring open-mouthed on the sodden moss, 'if I cannot understand their French. They talk so par-tic-ularly fast! It

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would have been much better to cut their beastly throats.'

When he presented himself again he was racked with a headache—penitent, and volubly afraid that in his drunkenness he might have been indiscreet. He loved the British Government—it was the source of all prosperity and honour, and his master at Rampur held the very same opinion. Upon this the men began to deride him and to quote past words, till step by step, with depreciating smirks, oily grins, and leers of infinite cunning, the poor Babu was beaten out of his defences and forced to speak—truth! When Lurgan was told the tale later, he mourned aloud that he could not have been in the place of the stubborn, inattentive coolies, who with grass mats over their heads and the raindrops puddling in their foot-prints, waited on the weather. All the Sahibs of their acquaintance—rough-clad men joyously returning year after year to their chosen gullies—had servants and cooks and orderlies, very often hillmen. These Sahibs travelled without any retinue. Therefore they were poor Sahibs, and ignorant; for no Sahib in his senses would follow a Bengali's advice. But the Bengali, appearing from somewhere, had given them money, and would make shift with their dialect. Used to comprehensive ill-treatment from their own colour, they suspected a trap somewhere, and stood by to run if occasion offered.

Then through the new-washed air, steaming with delicious earth-smells, the Babu led the way down the slopes—walking ahead of the coolies in pride; walking behind the foreigners in humility. His thoughts were many and various. The least of them would have interested his companions beyond words. But he was an

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agreeable guide, ever keen to point out the beauties of his royal master's domain. He peopled the hills with anything they had a mind to slay—thar, ibex, or markhor, and bear by Elisha's allowance. He discoursed of botany and ethnology with unimpeachable inaccuracy, and his store of local legends—he had been a trusted agent of the State for fifteen years, remember—was inexhaustible.

'Decidedly this fellow is an original,' said the taller of the two foreigners. 'He is like the nightmare of a Viennese courier.'

'He represents in petto India in transition—the monstrous hybridism of East and West,' the Russian replied. 'It is we who can deal with Orientals.'

'He has lost his own country and has not acquired any other. But he has a most complete hatred of his conquerors. Listen. He confides to me last night,' etc.

Under the striped umbrella Hurree Babu was straining ear and brain to follow the quick-poured French, and keeping both eyes on a kilta full of maps and documents—an extra large one with a double red oilskin cover. He did not wish to steal anything. He only desired to know what to steal, and, incidentally, how to get away when he had stolen it. He thanked all the Gods of Hindustan, and Herbert Spencer, that there remained some valuables to steal.

On the second day the road rose steeply to a grass spur above the forest; and it was here, about sunset, that they came across an aged lama—but they called him a bonze—sitting cross-legged above a mysterious chart held down by stones, which he was explaining to a young man, evidently a neophyte, of singular, though unwashen, beauty. The striped umbrella had been

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sighted half a march away, and Kim had suggested a halt till it came up to them.

'Ha!' said Hurree Babu, resourceful as Puss-in-Boots. 'That is eminent local holy man. Probably subject of my royal master.'

'What is he doing? It is very curious.'

'He is expounding holy picture—all hand-worked.'

The two men stood bare-headed in the wash of the afternoon sunlight low across the gold-coloured grass. The sullen coolies, glad of the check, halted and slid down their loads.

'Look!' said the Frenchman. 'It is like a picture for the birth of a religion—the first teacher and the first disciple. Is he a Buddhist?'

'Of some debased kind,' the other answered. 'There are no true Buddhists among the Hills. But look at the folds of the drapery. Look at his eyes—how insolent! Why does this make one feel that we are so young a people?' The speaker struck passionately at a tall weed. 'We have nowhere left our mark yet. Nowhere! That, do you understand, is what disquiets me.' He scowled at the placid face, and the monumental calm of the pose.

'Have patience. We shall make your mark together—we and you young people. Meantime, draw his picture.'

The Babu advanced loftily; his back out of all keeping with his deferential speech, or his wink towards Kim.

'Holy One, these be Sahibs. My medicines cured one of a flux, and I go into Simla to oversee his recovery. They wish to see thy picture—'

'To heal the sick is always good. This is the Wheel

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of Life,' said the lama, 'the same I showed thee in the hut at Ziglaur when the rain fell.'

'And to hear thee expound it.'

The lama's eyes lighted at the prospect of new listeners. 'To expound the Most Excellent Way is good. Have they any knowledge of Hindi, such as had the Keeper of Images?'

'A little, maybe.'

Hereat, simply as a child engrossed with a new game, the lama threw back his head and began the full-throated invocation of the Doctor of Divinity ere he opens the full doctrine. The strangers leaned on their alpenstocks and listened. Kim, squatting humbly, watched the red sunlight on their faces, and the blend and parting of their long shadows. They wore un-English leggings and curious girt-in belts that reminded him hazily of the pictures in a book at St. Xavier's library: 'The Adventures of a Young Naturalist in Mexico' was its name. Yes, they looked very like the wonderful M. Sumichrast of that tale, and very unlike the 'highly unscrupulous folk' of Hurree Babu's imagining. The coolies, earth-coloured and mute, crouched reverently some twenty or thirty yards away, and the Babu, the slack of his thin gear snapping like a marking-flag in the chill breeze, stood by with an air of happy proprietorship.

'These are the men,' Hurree whispered, as the ritual went on and the two whites followed the grass blade sweeping from Hell to Heaven and back again. 'All their books are in the large kilta with the reddish top,—books and reports and maps,—and I have seen a King's letter that either Hilas or Bunar has written. They guard it most carefully. They have sent nothing back from Hilas or Leh. That is sure.'

KIM

‘Who is with them?’

‘Only the beggar-coolies. They have no servants. They are so close they cook their own food.’

‘But what am I to do?’

‘Wait and see. Only if any chance comes to me thou wilt know where to seek for the papers.’

‘This were better in Mahbub Ali’s hands than a Bengali’s,’ said Kim scornfully.

‘There are more ways of getting to a sweetheart than butting down a wall.’

‘See here the Hell appointed for avarice and greed. Flanked upon the one side by Desire and on the other by Weariness.’ The lama warmed to his work, and one of the strangers sketched him in the quick-fading light.

‘That is enough,’ the man said at last brusquely. ‘I cannot understand him, but I want that picture. He is a better artist than I. Ask him if he will sell it.’

‘He says “No, sar,”’ the Babu replied. The lama, of course, would no more have parted with his chart to a casual wayfarer than an archbishop would pawn the holy vessels of a cathedral. All Tibet is full of cheap reproductions of the Wheel; but the lama was an artist, as well as a wealthy abbot in his own place.

‘Perhaps in three days, or four, or ten, if I perceive that the Sahib is a Seeker and of good understanding, I may myself draw him another. But this was used for the initiation of a novice. Tell him so, hakim.’

‘He wishes it now—for money.’

The lama shook his head slowly and began to fold up the Wheel. The Russian, on his side, saw no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper. He drew out a handful of rupees, and snatched half-jestingly at the chart, which tore in the lama’s grip. A

low murmur of horror went up from the coolies—some of whom were Spiti men and, by their lights, good Buddhists. The lama rose at the insult; his hand went to the heavy iron pencease that is the priest's weapon, and the Babu danced in agony.

'Now you see —you see why I wanted witnesses. They are highly unscrupulous people. Oh Sar! Sar! You must not hit holy man!'

'Chela! He has defiled the Written Word!'

It was too late. Before Kim could ward him off, the Russian struck the old man full on the face. Next instant he was rolling over and over down hill with Kim at his throat. The blow had waked every unknown Irish devil in the boy's blood, and the sudden fall of his enemy did the rest. The lama dropped to his knees, half-stunned; the coolies under their loads fled up the hill as fast as plainsmen run across the level. They had seen sacrilege unspeakable, and it behoved them to get away before the Gods and devils of the hills took vengeance. The Frenchman ran towards the lama, fumbling at his revolver with some notion of making him a hostage for his companion. A shower of cutting stones —hillmen are very straight shots—drove him away, and a coolie from Ao-chung snatched the lama into the stampede. All came about as swiftly as the sudden mountain-darkness.

'They have taken the baggage and all the guns,' yelled the Frenchman, firing blindly into the twilight.

'All right, Sar! All right! Don't shoot. I go to rescue,' and Hurree, pounding down the slope, cast himself bodily upon the delighted and astonished Kim, who was banging his breathless foe's head against a boulder.

KIM

‘Go back to the coolies,’ whispered the Babu in his ear. ‘They have the baggage. The papers are in the kilta with the red top, but look through all. Take their papers, and specially the murasla (King’s letter). Go! The other man comes!’

Kim tore up hill. A revolver-bullet rang on a rock by his side, and he cowered partridge-wise.

‘If you shoot,’ shouted Hurree, ‘they will descend and annihilate us. I have rescued the gentleman, Sar. This is par-tic-ularly dangerous.’

‘By Jove!’ Kim was thinking hard in English. ‘This is dam-tight place, but I think it is self-defence.’ He felt in his bosom for Mahbub’s gift, and uncertainly—save for a few practice shots in the Bikaner desert, he had never used the little gun—pulled trigger.

‘What did I say, Sar?’ The Babu seemed to be in tears. ‘Come down here and assist to resuscitate. We are all up a tree, I tell you.’

The shots ceased. There was a sound of stumbling feet, and Kim hurried upward through the gloom, swearing like a cat—or a country-bred.

‘Did they wound thee, chela?’ called the lama above him.

‘No. And thou?’ He dived into a clump of stunted firs.

‘Unhurt. Come away. We go with these folk to Shamlegh-under-the-Snow.’

‘But not before we have done justice,’ a voice cried. ‘I have got the Sahibs’ guns—all four. Let us go down.’

‘He struck the Holy One—we saw it! Our cattle will be barren—our wives will cease to bear! The snows will slide upon us as we go home. . . . Atop of all other oppression too!’

The little fir-clump filled with clamouring coolies—panic-stricken, and in their terror capable of anything. The man from Ao-chung clicked the breech-bolt of his gun impatiently, and made as to go down hill.

‘Wait a little, Holy One; they cannot go far: wait till I return.’

‘It is this person who has suffered wrong,’ said the lama, his hand over his brow.

‘For that very reason,’ was the reply.

‘If this person overlooks it, your hands are clean. Moreover, ye acquire merit by obedience.’

‘Wait, and we will all go to Shamlegh together,’ the man insisted.

For a moment, for just so long as it needs to stuff a cartridge into a breech-loader, the lama hesitated. Then he rose to his feet, and laid a finger on the man’s shoulder.

‘Hast thou heard? I say there shall be no killing—I who was Abbot of Suchzen. Is it any lust of thine to be re-born as a rat, or a snake under the eaves—a worm in the belly of the most mean beast? Is it thy wish to—’

The man from Ao-chung fell to his knees, for the voice boomed like a Tibetan devil-gong.

‘Ai! ai!’ cried the Spiti men. ‘Do not curse us—do not curse him. It was but his zeal, Holy One! . . . Put down the rifle, fool!’

‘Anger on anger! Evil on evil! There will be no killing. Let the priest-beaters go in bondage to their own acts. Just and sure is the Wheel, swerving not a hair! They will be born many times—in torment.’ His head drooped, and he leaned heavily on Kim’s shoulder.

‘I have come near to great evil, chela,’ he whispered

KIM

in that dead hush under the pines. ‘I was tempted to loose the bullet; and truly, in Tibet there would have been a heavy and a slow death for them. . . . He struck me across the face . . . upon the flesh . . .’ He slid to the ground, breathing heavily, and Kim could hear the over-driven heart bump and check.

‘Have they hurt him to the death?’ said the Ao-chung man, while the others stood mute.

Kim knelt over the body in deadly fear. ‘Nay,’ he cried passionately, ‘this is only a weakness.’ Then he remembered that he was a white man, with a white man’s camp-fittings at his service. ‘Open the kiltas! The Sahibs may have a medicine.’

‘Oho! Then I know it,’ said the Ao-chung man with a laugh. ‘Not for five years was I Yankling Sahib’s shikarri without knowing that medicine. I too have tasted it. Behold!’

He drew from his breast a bottle of cheap whisky—such as is sold to explorers at Leh—and cleverly forced a little between the lama’s teeth.

‘So I did when Yankling Sahib twisted his foot beyond Astor. Aha! I have already looked into their baskets—but we will make fair division at Shamlegh. Give him a little more. It is good medicine. Feel! His heart goes better now. Lay his head down and rub a little on the chest. If he had waited quietly while I accounted for the Sahibs this would never have come. But perhaps the Sahibs may chase us here. Then it would not be wrong to shoot them with their own guns, heh?’

‘One is paid, I think, already,’ said Kim between his teeth. ‘I kicked him in the groin as we went down hill. Would I had killed him?’

KIM

'It is well to be brave when one does not live in Rampur,' said one whose hut lay within a few miles of the Rajah's rickety palace. 'If we get a bad name among the Sahibs, none will employ us as shikarris any more.'

'Oh, but these are not Angrezi Sahibs—not merry-minded men like Fostum Sahib or Yankling Sahib. They are foreigners—they cannot speak Angrezi as do Sahibs.'

Here the lama coughed and sat up, groping for the rosary.

'There shall be no killing,' he murmured. 'Just is the Wheel! Evil on evil—'

'Nay, Holy One. We are all here.' The Ao-chung man timidly patted his feet. 'Except by thy order, no one shall be slain. Rest awhile. We will make a little camp here, and later, as the moon rises, we go to Shamlegh-under-the-Snow.'

'After a blow,' said a Spiti man sententiously, 'it is best to sleep.'

'There is, as it were, a dizziness at the back of my neck, and a pinching in it. Let me lay my head on thy lap, chela. I am an old man, but not free from passion. . . . We must think of the Cause of Things.'

'Give him a blanket. We dare not light a fire lest the Sahibs see.'

'Better get away to Shamlegh. None will follow us to Shamlegh.'

This was the nervous Rampur man.

'I have been Fostum Sahib's shikarri, and I am Yankling Sahib's shikarri. I should have been with Yankling Sahib now but for this cursed beegar (the corvee). Let two men watch below with the guns lest the Sahibs do more foolishness. I shall not leave this Holy One.'

They sat down a little apart from the lama, and, after listening awhile, passed round a water-pipe whose receiver was an old Day and Martin blacking-bottle. The glow of the red charcoal as it went from hand to hand lit up the narrow, blinking eyes, the high Chinese cheek-bones, and the bull-throats that melted away into the dark duffle folds round the shoulders. They looked like kobolds from some magic mine—gnomes of the hills in conclave. And while they talked, the voices of the snow-waters round them diminished one by one as the night-frost choked and clogged the runnels.

'How he stood up against us!' said a Spiti man admiring. 'I remember an old ibex, out Ladakh-way, that Dupont Sahib missed on a shoulder-shot, seven seasons back, standing up just like him. Dupont Sahib was a good shikarri.'

'Not as good as Yankling Sahib.' The Ao-chung man took a pull at the whisky-bottle and passed it over. 'Now hear me—unless any other man thinks he knows more.'

The challenge was not taken up.

'We go to Shamlegh when the moon rises. There we will fairly divide the baggage between us. I am content with this new little rifle and all its cartridges.'

'Are the bears only bad on thy holding?' said a mate, sucking at the pipe.

'No; but musk-pods are worth six rupees apiece now, and thy women can have the canvas of the tents and some of the cooking-gear. We will do all that at Shamlegh before dawn. Then we all go our ways, remembering that we have never seen or taken service with these Sahibs, who may, indeed, say that we have stolen their baggage.'

KIM

‘That is well for thee, but what will our Rajah say?’

‘Who is to tell him? Those Sahibs, who cannot speak our talk, or the Babu, who for his own ends gave us money? Will he lead an army against us? What evidence will remain? That we do not need we shall throw on Shamlegh midden, where no man has yet set foot.’

‘Who is at Shamlegh this summer?’ The place was only a grazing centre of three or four huts.

‘The Woman of Shamlegh. She has no love for Sahibs, as we know. The others can be pleased with little presents; and here is enough for us all.’ He patted the fat sides of the nearest basket.

‘But—but—’

‘I have said they are not true Sahibs. All their skins and heads were bought in the bazar at Leh. I know the marks. I showed them to ye last march.’

‘True. They were all bought skins and heads. Some had even the moth in them.’

That was a shrewd argument, and the Ao-chung man knew his fellows.

‘If the worst comes to the worst, I shall tell Yankling Sahib, who is a man of a merry mind, and he will laugh. We are not doing any wrong to any Sahibs whom we know. They are priest-beaters. They frightened us. We fled! Who knows where we dropped the baggage? Do ye think Yankling Sahib will permit down-country police to wander all over the hills, disturbing his game? It is a far cry from Simla to Chini, and farther from Shamlegh to Shamlegh midden.’

‘So be it, but I carry the big kilta. The basket with the red top that the Sahibs pack themselves every morning.’

‘Thus it is proved,’ said the Shamlegh man adroitly.

KIM

‘that they are Sahibs of no account. Who ever heard of Fostum Sahib, or Yankling Sahib, or even the little Peel Sahib that sits up of nights to shoot serow—I say, who ever heard of these Sahibs coming into the hills without a down-country cook, and a bearer, and—and all manner of well-paid, high-handed and oppressive folk in their tail? How can they make trouble? What of the kilta?’

‘Nothing, but that it is full of the Written Word—books and papers in which they wrote, and strange instruments, as of worship.’

‘Shamlegh midden will take them all.’

‘True! But how if we insult the Sahibs’ Gods thereby? I do not like to handle the Written Word in that fashion. And their brass idols are beyond my comprehension. It is no plunder for simple hill-folk.’

‘The old man still sleeps. Hst! We will ask his chela.’ The Ao-chung man refreshed himself, and swelled with pride of leadership.

‘We have here,’ he whispered, ‘a kilta whose nature we do not know.’

‘But I do,’ said Kim cautiously. The lama drew breath in natural, easy sleep, and Kim had been thinking of Hurree’s last words. As a player of the Great Game, he was disposed just then to reverence the Babu. ‘It is a kilta with a red top full of very wonderful things, not to be handled by fools.’

‘I said it; I said it,’ cried the bearer of that burden. ‘Thinkest thou it will betray us?’

‘Not if it be given to me. I will draw out its magic. Otherwise it will do great harm.’

‘A priest always takes his share.’ Whisky was demoralising the Ao-chung man.

KIM

'It is no matter to me,' Kim answered, with the craft of his mother-country. 'Share it among you, and see what comes!'

'Not I. I was only jesting. Give the order. There is more than enough for us all. We go our way from Shamlegh in the dawn.'

They arranged and re-arranged their artless little plans for another hour, while Kim shivered with cold and pride. The humour of the situation tickled the Irish and the Oriental in his soul. Here were the emissaries of the dread Power of the North, very possibly as great in their own land as Mahbub or Colonel Creighton, suddenly smitten helpless. One of them, he privately knew, would be lame for a time. They had made promises to Kings. To-night they lay out somewhere below him, chartless, foodless, tentless, gunless—except for Hurree Babu, guideless. And this collapse of their Great Game (Kim wondered to whom they would report it), this panicky bolt into the night, had come about through no craft of Hurree's or contrivance of Kim's, but simply, beautifully, and inevitably as the capture of Mahbub's faquir-friends by the zealous young policeman at Umballa.

'They are there—with nothing; and, by Jove, it is cold! I am here with all their things. Oh, they will be angry! I am sorry for Hurree Babu.'

Kim might have saved his pity, for though at that moment the Bengali suffered acutely in the flesh, his soul was puffed and lofty. A mile down the hill, on the edge of the pine-forest, two half-frozen men—one powerfully sick at intervals—were varying mutual recriminations with the most poignant abuse of the Babu, who seemed distraught with terror. They demanded a

KIM

plan of action. He explained that they were very lucky to be alive; that their coolies, if not then stalking them, had passed beyond recall; that the Rajah, his master, was ninety miles away, and, so far from lending them money and a retinue for the Simla journey, would surely cast them into prison if he heard that they had hit a priest. He enlarged on this sin and its consequences till they bade him change the subject. Their one hope, said he, was unostentatious flight from village to village till they reached civilisation; and, for the hundredth time dissolved in tears, he demanded of the high stars why the Sahibs ‘had beaten holy man.’

Ten steps would have taken Hurree into the creaking gloom utterly beyond their reach—to the shelter and food of the nearest village, where glib-tongued doctors were scarce. But he preferred to endure cold, belly-pinch, bad words, and occasional blows in the company of his honoured employers. Crouched against a tree-trunk, he sniffed dolefully.

‘And have you thought,’ said the uninjured man hotly, ‘what sort of spectacle we shall present wandering through these hills among these aborigines?’

Hurree Babu had thought of little else for some hours, but the remark was not to his address.

‘We cannot wander! I can hardly walk,’ groaned Kim’s victim.

‘Perhaps the holy man will be merciful in loving-kindness, Sar, otherwise—’

‘I promise myself a peculiar pleasure in emptying my revolver into that young bonze when next we meet,’ was the unchristian answer.

‘Revolvers! Vengeance! Bonzes!’ Hurree crouched lower. The war was breaking out afresh. ‘Have you

no consideration for our loss? The baggage! The baggage!' He could hear the speaker literally dancing on the grass. 'Everything we bore! Everything we have secured! Our gains! Eight months' work! Do you know what that means? "Decidedly it is we who can deal with Orientals!" Oh, you have done well.'

They fell to it in several tongues, and Hurree smiled. Kim was with the kiltas, and in the kiltas lay eight months of good diplomacy. There was no means of communicating with the boy, but he could be trusted. For the rest, he could so stage-manage the journey through the hills that Hilas, Bunar, and four hundred miles of hill-roads should tell the tale for a generation. Men who cannot control their own coolies are little respected in the Hills, and the hillman has a very keen sense of humour.

'If I had done it myself,' thought Hurree, 'it would not have been better; and, by Jove, now I think of it, of course I arranged it myself. How quick I have been! Just when I ran down hill I thought it! Thee outrage was accidental, but onlee me could have worked it—ah—for all it was dam well worth. Consider the moral effect upon these ignorant peoples! No treaties—no papers—no written documents at all—and me to interpret for them. How I shall laugh with the Colonel! I wish I had their papers also: but you cannot occupy two places in space simultaneously. Thatt is axiomatic.'

CHAPTER XIV

My brother kneels (so saith Kabir)
To stone and brass in heathen-wise,
But in my brother's voice I hear
 My own unanswered agonies.
His God is as his Fates assign—
His prayer is all the world's—and mine.

Kabir.

AT moonrise the cautious coolies got under way. The lama, refreshed by his sleep and the spirit, needed no more than Kim's shoulder to bear him along—a silent, swift-striding man. They held the shale-sprinkled grass for an hour, swept round the shoulder of an immortal cliff, and climbed into a new country entirely blocked off from all sight of Chini valley. A huge pasture-ground ran up fan-shaped to the living snow. At its base was perhaps half an acre of flat land, on which stood a few soil and timber huts. Behind them—for, hill-fashion, they were perched on the edge of all things—the ground fell sheer two thousand feet to Shamlegh midden, where never yet man has set foot.

The men made no motion to divide the plunder till they had seen the lama bedded down in the best room of the place, with Kim shampooing his feet, Mohammedan fashion.

KIM

‘We will send food,’ said the Ao-chung man, ‘and the red-topped kilta. By dawn there will be none to give evidence, one way or the other. If anything is not needed in the kilta—see here!’

He pointed through the window—opening into space that was filled with moonlight reflected from the snow—and threw out an empty whisky-bottle.

‘No need to listen for the fall. This is the world’s end,’ he said, and swung off. The lama looked forth, a hand on either sill, with eyes that shone like yellow opals. From the enormous pit before him white peaks lifted themselves yearning to the moonlight. The rest was as the darkness of interstellar space.

‘These,’ he said slowly, ‘are indeed my Hills. Thus should a man abide, perched above the world, separated from delights, considering vast matters.’

‘Yes; if he has a chela to prepare tea for him, and to fold a blanket for his head, and to chase out calving cows.’

A smoky lamp burned in a niche, but the full moon-light beat it down; and by the mixed light, stooping above the food-bag and cups, Kim moved like a tall ghost.

‘Ai! But now I have let the blood cool my head still beats and drums, and there is a cord round the back of my neck.’

‘No wonder. It was a strong blow. May he who dealt it—’

‘But for my own passions there would have been no evil.’

‘What evil? Thou hast saved the Sahibs from death they deserved a hundred times.’

‘The lesson is not well learnt, chela.’ The lama came

KIM

to rest on a folded blanket, as Kim went forward with his evening routine. ‘The blow was but a shadow upon a shadow. Evil in itself—my legs weary apace these latter days!—it met evil in me—anger, rage, and a lust to return evil. These wrought in my blood, woke tumult in my stomach, and dazzled my ears.’ Here he drank scalding block-tea ceremonially, taking the hot cup from Kim’s hand. ‘Had I been passionless, the evil blow would have done only bodily evil—a scar, or a bruise—which is illusion. But my mind was not abstracted, for rushed in straightway a lust to let the Spiti men kill. In fighting that lust, my soul was torn and wrenched beyond a thousand blows. Not till I had repeated the Blessings (he meant the Buddhist Beatitudes) did I achieve calm. But the evil planted in me by that moment’s carelessness works out to its end. Just is the Wheel, swerving not a hair! Learn the lesson, chela.’

‘It is too high for me,’ Kim muttered. ‘I am still all shaken. I am glad I hurt the man.’

‘I felt that sleeping upon thy knees, in the wood below. It disquieted me in my dreams—the evil in thy soul working through to mine. Yet on the other hand’—he loosed his rosary—‘I have acquired merit by saving two lives—the lives of those that wronged me. Now I must see into the Cause of Things. The boat of my soul staggers.’

‘Sleep, and be strong. That is wisest.’

‘I meditate: there is a need greater than thou knowest.’

Till the dawn, hour after hour, as the moonlight paled on the high peaks, and that which had been belted blackness on the sides of the far hills showed as tender

KIM

green forest, the lama stared fixedly at the wall. From time to time he groaned. Outside the barred door, where discomfited kine came to ask for their old stable, Shamlegh and the coolies gave itself up to plunder and riotous living. The Ao-chung man was their leader, and once they had opened the Sahibs' tinned foods and found that they were very good they dared not turn back. Shamlegh kitchen-midden took the dunnage.

When Kim, after a night of bad dreams, stole forth to brush his teeth in the morning chill, a fair-coloured woman with turquoise-studded headgear drew him aside.

‘The others have gone. They left thee this kilta as the promise was. I do not love Sahibs, but thou wilt make us a charm in return for it. We do not wish little Shamlegh to get a bad name on account of the—accident. I am the Woman of Shamlegh.’ She looked him over with bold, bright eyes, unlike the usual furtive glance of hillwomen.

‘Assuredly. But it must be done in secret.’

She raised the heavy kilta like a toy and slung it into her own hut.

‘Out and bar the door! Let none come near till it is finished.’

‘But afterwards—we may talk?’

Kim tilted the kilta on the floor—a cascade of Survey-instruments, books, diaries, letters, maps, and queerly scented native correspondence. At the very bottom was an embroidered bag covering a sealed, gilded, and illuminated document such as one King sends to another. Kim caught his breath with delight, and reviewed the situation from a Sahib’s point of view.

‘The books I do not want. Besides, they are loga-

rithms—Survey, I suppose.' He laid them aside. 'The letters I do not understand, but Colonel Creighton will. They must all be kept. The maps—they draw better maps than me—of course. All the native letters—oho! —and particularly the murasla.' He sniffed the embroidered bag. 'That must be from Hilas or Bunar, and Hurree Babu spoke truth. By Jove! It is a fine haul. I wish Hurree could know. . . . The rest must go out of the window.' He fingered a superb prismatic compass and the shiny top of a theodolite. But after all, a Sahib cannot very well steal, and the things might be inconvenient evidence later. He sorted out every scrap of manuscript, every map, and the native letters. They made one softish slab. The three locked ferril-backed books, with five worn pocket-books, he put aside.

'The letters and the murasla I must carry inside my coat and under my belt, and the hand-written books I must put into the food-bag. It will be very heavy. No. I do not think there is anything more. If there is, the coolies have thrown it down the khud, so thatt is all right. Now you go too.' He repacked the kilta with all he meant to lose, and hove it up on to the window-sill. A thousand feet below lay a long, lazy, round-shouldered bank of mist, as yet untouched by the morning sun. A thousand feet below that was an hundred-year-old pine-forest. He could see the green tops looking like a bed of moss when a wind-eddy thinned the cloud.

'No! I don't think any one will go after you!'

The wheeling basket vomited its contents as it dropped. The theodolite hit a jutting cliff-ledge and exploded like a shell; the books, inkstand, paint-boxes, compasses, and rulers showed for a few seconds like a swarm of bees.

Then they vanished; and, though Kim, hanging half out of window, strained his young ears, never a sound came up from the gulf.

'Five hundred—a thousand rupees could not buy them,' he thought sorrowfully. 'It was verree wasteful, but I have all their other stuff—everything they did—I hope. Now how the deuce am I to tell Hurree Babu, and whatt the deuce am I to do? And my old man is sick. I must tie up the letters in oilcloth. That is something to do first—else they will get all sweated. . . . And I am all alone!' He bound them into a neat packet, swedging down the stiff, sticky oilcloth at the corners, for his roving life had made him as methodical as an old hunter in matters of the road. Then with double care he packed away the books at the bottom of the food-bag.

The woman rapped at the door.

'But thou hast made no charm,' she said, looking about.

'There is no need.' Kim had completely overlooked the necessity for a little patter-talk. The woman laughed at his confusion irreverently.

'None—for thee. Thou canst cast a spell by the mere winking of an eye. But think of us poor people when thou art gone! They were all too drunk last night to hear a woman. Thou art not drunk?'

'I am a priest.' Kim had recovered himself, and, the woman being aught but unlovely, thought best to stand on his office.

'I warned them that the Sahibs will be angry and will make an inquisition and a report to the Rajah. There is also the Babu with them. Clerks have long tongues.'

KIM

‘Is that all thy trouble?’ The plan rose fully formed in Kim’s mind, and he smiled ravishingly.

‘Not all,’ quoth the woman, putting out a hard brown hand all covered with turquoises set in silver.

‘I can finish that in a breath,’ he went on quickly. ‘The Babu is the very hakim (thou hast heard of him?) who was wandering among the hills by Ziglaur. I know him.’

‘He will tell for the sake of a reward. Sahibs cannot distinguish one hillman from another, but Babus have eyes for men—and women.’

‘Carry a word to him from me.’

‘There is nothing I would not do for thee.’

He accepted the compliment calmly, as men must in lands where women make the love, tore a leaf from a note-book, and with a patent indelible pencil wrote in gross Shikast—the script that bad little boys use when they write dirt on walls: ‘I have everything that they have written: their pictures of the country, and many letters. Especially the murasla. Tell me what to do. I am at Shamlegh-under-the-Snow. The old man is sick.’

‘Take this to him. It will altogether shut his mouth. He cannot have gone far.’

‘Indeed no. They are still in the forest across the spur. Our children went to watch them when the light came, and have cried the news as they moved.’

Kim looked his astonishment; but from the edge of the sheep-pasture floated a shrill, kite-like trill. A child tending cattle had picked it up from a brother or sister on the far side of the slope that commanded Chini valley.

‘My husbands are also out there gathering wood.’

KIM

She drew a handful of walnuts from her bosom, split one neatly, and began to eat. Kim affected blank ignorance.

‘Dost thou not know the meaning of the walnut-priest?’ she said coyly, and handed him the half-shells.

‘Well thought of.’ He slipped the piece of paper between them quickly. ‘Hast thou a little wax to close them on this letter?’

The woman sighed aloud, and Kim relented.

‘There is no payment till service has been rendered. Carry this to the Babu, and say it was sent by the Son of the Charm.’

‘Ai! Truly! Truly! By a magician—who is like a Sahib.’

‘Nay, Son of the Charm: and ask if there be any answer.’

‘But if he offer a rudeness? I—I am afraid.’

Kim laughed. ‘He is, I have no doubt, very tired and very hungry. The Hills make cold bedfellows. Hai, my’—it was on the tip of his tongue to say Mother, but he turned it to Sister—‘thou art a wise and witty woman. By this time all the villages know what has befallen the Sahibs—eh?’

‘True. News was at Ziglaur by midnight, and by to-morrow should be at Kotgarh. The villages are both afraid and angry.’

‘No need. Tell the villages to feed the Sahibs and pass them on, in peace. We must get them quietly away from our valleys. To steal is one thing—to kill another. The Babu will understand, and there will be no after-complaints. Be swift. I must tend my master when he wakes.’

‘So be it. After service—thou hast said?—comes

KIM

the reward. I am the Woman of Shamlegh, and I hold from the Rajah. I am no common bearer of babes. Shamlegh is thine: hoof and horn and hide, milk and butter. Take or leave.'

She turned resolutely uphill, her silver necklaces clicking on her broad breast, to meet the morning sun fifteen hundred feet above them. This time Kim thought in the vernacular as he waxed down the oilskin edges of the packets.

'How can a man follow the Way or the Great Game when he is eternally pestered by women? There was that girl at Akrola by the Ford; and there was the scullion's wife behind the dovecot—not counting the others—and now comes this one! When I was a child it was well enough, but now I am a man and they will not regard me as a man. Walnuts indeed! Ho! ho! It is almonds in the Plains!'

He went out to levy on the village—not with a begging-bowl, which might do for down-country, but in the manner of a prince. Shamlegh's summer population is only three families—four women and eight or nine men. They were all full of tinned meats and mixed drinks, from ammoniated quinine to white vodka, for they had taken their full share in the overnight loot. The neat Continental tents had been cut up and shared long ago, and there were patent aluminum saucepans abroad.

But they considered the lama's presence a perfect safeguard against all consequences, and impenitently brought Kim of their best—even to a drink of chang—the barley-beer that comes from Ladakh-way. Then they thawed out in the sun, and sat with their legs hanging over infinite abysses, chattering, laughing, and smoking. They judged India and its Government solely

from their experience of wandering Sahibs who had employed them or their friends as shikarris. Kim heard tales of shots missed upon ibex, serow, or markhor, by Sahibs twenty years in their graves—every detail lighted from behind like twigs on tree-tops seen against lightning. They told him of their little diseases, and, more important, the diseases of their tiny, sure-footed cattle; of trips as far as Kotgarh, where the strange missionaries live, and beyond even to marvellous Simla, where the streets are paved with silver, and any one, look you, can get service with the Sahibs, who ride about in two-wheeled carts and spend money with a spade. Presently, grave and aloof, walking very heavily, the lama joined himself to the chatter under the eaves, and they gave him great room. The thin air refreshed him, and he sat on the edge of precipices with the best of them, and, when talk languished, flung pebbles into the void. Thirty miles away, as the eagle flies, lay the next range, seamed and channelled and pitted with little patches of brush—forests, each a day's dark march. Behind the village, Shamlegh hill itself cut off all view to southward. It was like sitting in a swallow's nest under the eaves of the roof of the world.

From time to time the lama stretched out his hand, and with a little, low-voiced prompting would point out the road to Spiti and north across the Parungla.

'Beyond, where the hills lie thickest, lies De-ch'en' (he meant Han-le), 'the great Monastery. s'Tag-stan-ras-ch'en built it, and of him there runs this tale.' Whereupon he told it: a fantastic piled narrative of bewitchment and miracles that set Shamlegh agasp. Turning west a little, he speered for the green hills of Kulu, and sought Kailung under the glaciers. 'For

KIM

thither came I in the old, old days. From Leh I came, over the Baralachi.'

'Yes, yes; we know it,' said the far-faring people of Shamlegh.

'And I slept two nights with the priests of Kailung. These are the hills of my delight! Shadows blessed above all other shadows! There my eyes opened on this world; there my eyes were opened to this world; there I found Enlightenment; and there I girt my loins for my Search. Out of the Hills I came—the high Hills and the strong winds. Oh, just is the Wheel!' He blessed them in detail—the great glaciers, the naked rocks, the piled moraines and tumbled shale; dry up-land, hidden salt-lake, age-old timber and fruitful water-shot valley one after the other, as a dying man blesses his folk, and Kim marvelled at his passion.

'Yes—yes. There is no place like our Hills,' said the people of Shamlegh. And they fell to wondering how a man could live in the hot terrible Plains where the cattle run as big as elephants, unfit to plough on a hill-side; where village touches village, they had heard, for ahundred miles; where folk went about stealing in gangs, and what the robbers spared the Police carried utterly away.

So the still forenoon wore through, and at the end of it Kim's messenger dropped from the steep pasture as unbreathed as when she had set out.

'I sent a word to the hakim,' Kim explained, while she made reverence.

'He joined himself to the idolaters? Nay, I remember he did a healing upon one of them. He has acquired merit, though the healed employed his strength for evil. Just is the Wheel! What of the hakim?'

KIM

'I feared that thou hadst been bruised and—and I knew he was wise.' Kim took the waxed walnut-shell and read in English on the back of his note: 'Your favour received. Cannot get away from present company at present, but shall take them into Simla. After which, hope to rejoin you. Inexpedient to follow angry gentlemen. Return by same road you came, and will overtake. Highly gratified about correspondence due to my forethought.' 'He says, Holy One, that he will escape from the idolaters, and will return to us. Shall we wait awhile at Shamlegh, then?'

The lama looked long and lovingly upon the hills and shook his head.

'That may not be, chela. From my bones outward I do desire it, but it is forbidden. I have seen the Cause of Things.'

'Why? When the Hills give thee back thy strength day by day? Remember we were weak and fainting down below there in the Doon.'

'I became strong to do evil and to forget. A brawler and a swashbuckler upon the hillsides was I.' Kim bit back a smile. 'Just and perfect is the Wheel, swerving not a hair. When I was a man—a long time ago—I did pilgrimage to Guru Ch'wan among the poplars' (he pointed Bhotanwards), 'where they keep the Sacred Horse.'

'Quiet, be quiet!' said Shamlegh, all arow. 'He speaks of Jam-lin-nin-k'or, the Horse That Can Go Round The World In a Day.'

'I speak to my chela only,' said the lama, in gentle reproof, and they scattered like frost on south eaves of a morning. 'I did not seek truth in those days, but the talk of doctrine. All illusion! I drank the beer and

ate the bread of Guru Ch'wan. Next day one said: "We go out to fight Sangor Gutok down the valley to discover (mark again how Lust is tied to Anger!) which abbot shall bear rule in the valley, and take the profit of the prayers they print at Sangor Gutok." I went, and we fought a day.'

'But how, Holy One?'

'With our long pencases as I could have shown. . . . I say, we fought under the poplars, both abbots and all the monks, and one laid open my forehead to the bone. See!' He tilted back his cap and showed a puckered silvery scar. 'Just and perfect is the Wheel! Yesterday the scar itched, and after fifty years I recalled how it was dealt and the face of him who dealt it; dwelling a little in illusion. Followed that which thou didst see—strife and stupidity. Just is the Wheel! The idolater's blow fell upon the scar. Then I was shaken in my soul: my soul was darkened, and the boat of my soul rocked upon the waters of illusion. Not till I came to Shamlegh could I meditate upon the Cause of Things, or trace the running grass-roots of Evil. I strove all the long night.'

'But, Holy One, thou art innocent of all evil. May I be thy sacrifice!'

Kim was genuinely distressed at the old man's sorrow, and Mahbub Ali's phrase slipped out unawares.

'In the dawn,' he went on more gravely, ready rosary clicking between the slow sentences, 'came enlightenment. It is here. . . . I am an old man . . . hill-bred, hill-fed, never to sit down among my Hills. Three years I travelled through Hind, but—can earth be stronger than Mother Earth? My stupid body yearned to the Hills and the snow of the Hills, from

below there. I said, and it is true, my Search is sure. So, at the Kulu woman's house I turned hillward, overpersuaded by myself. There is no blame to the hakim. He—following Desire—foretold that the Hills would make me strong. They strengthened me to do evil, to forget my Search. I delighted in life and the lust of life. I desired strong slopes to climb. I cast about to find them. I measured the strength of my body, which is evil, against the high hills. I made a mock of thee when thy breath came short under Jamnotri. I jested when thou wouldest not face the snow of the pass.'

'But what harm? I was afraid. It was just. I am not a hillman; and I loved thee for thy new strength.'

'More than once I remember,' he rested his cheek dolefully on his hand, 'I sought thy praise and the hakim's for the mere strength of my legs. Thus evil followed evil till the cup was full. Just is the Wheel! All Hind for three years did me all honour. From the Fountain of Wisdom in the Wonder House to'—he smiled—'a little child playing by a big gun—the world prepared my road. And why?'

'Because we loved thee. It is only the fever of the blow. I myself am still sick and shaken.'

'No! It was because I was upon the Way—tuned as are sinen (cymbals) to the purpose of the Law. I departed from that ordinance. The tune was broken: followed the punishment. In my own Hills, on the edge of my own country, in the very place of my evil desire, comes the buffet—here!' (He touched his brow.) 'As a novice is beaten when he misplaces the cups, so am I beaten, who was Abbot of Suchzen. No word, look you, but a blow, chela.'

'But the Sahibs did not know thee, Holy One?'

'We were well matched. Ignorance and Lust met Ignorance and Lust upon the road, and they begat Anger. The blow was a sign to me, who am no better than a strayed yak, that my place is not here. Who can read the Cause of an act is half-way to Freedom! "Back to the path," says the Blow. "The Hills are not for thee. Thou canst not choose Freedom and go in bondage to the delight of life."

'If we had never met that thrice-cursed Russian!'

'Our Lord Himself cannot make the Wheel swing backward. And for my merit that I had acquired I gain yet another sign.' He put his hand in his bosom, and drew forth the Wheel of Life. 'Look! I considered this after I had meditated. There remains untorn by the idolater no more than the breadth of my finger-nail.'

'I see.'

'So much, then, is the span of my life in this body. I have served the Wheel all my days. Now the Wheel serves me. But for the merit I have acquired in guiding thee upon the Way, there would have been added to me yet another life ere I had found my River. Is it plain, chela?'

Kim stared at the brutally disfigured chart. From left to right diagonally the rent ran—from the Eleventh House where Desire gives birth to the Child (as it is drawn by Tibetans)—across the human and animal worlds, to the Fifth House—the empty House of the Senses. The logic was unanswerable.

'Before our Lord won enlightenment,' the lama folded all away with reverence, 'He was tempted. I too have been tempted, but it is finished. The Arrow fell in the Plains—not in the Hills. Therefore, what make we here?'

KIM

‘Shall we at least wait for the hakim?’

‘I know how long I live in this body. What can a hakim do?’

‘But thou art all sick and shaken. Thou canst not walk.’

‘How can I be sick if I see Freedom?’ He rose unsteadily to his feet.

‘Then I must get food from the village. Oh, the weary Road!’ Kim felt that he too needed rest.

‘That is lawful. Let us eat and go. The Arrow fell in Plains . . . but I yielded to Desire. Make ready, chela.’

Kim turned to the woman with the turquoise head-gear who had been idly pitching pebbles over the cliff. She smiled very kindly.

‘I found him like a strayed buffalo in a corn-field—the Babu; snorting and sneezing with cold. He was so hungry that he forgot his dignity and gave me sweet words. The Sahibs have nothing.’ She flung out an empty palm. ‘One is very sick about the stomach. Thy work?’

Kim nodded, with a bright eye.

‘I spoke to the Bengali first—and to the people of a nearby village after. The Sahibs will be given food as they need it—nor will the people ask money. The plunder is already distributed. That Babu makes lying speeches to the Sahibs. Why does he not leave them?’

‘Out of the greatness of his heart.’

‘Was never a Bengali yet had one bigger than a dried walnut. But it is no matter. . . . Now as to walnuts. After service comes reward. I have said the village is thine.’

‘It is my loss,’ Kim began. ‘Even now I had planned

KIM

desirable things in my heart which'—there is no need to go through the compliments proper to these occasions. He sighed deeply . . . 'But my master, led by a vision—'

'Huh! What can old eyes see except a full begging-bowl?'

'—turns from this village to the Plains again.'

'Bid him stay.'

Kim shook his head. 'I know my Holy One, and his rage if he be crossed,' he replied impressively. 'His curses shake the Hills.'

'Pity they did not save him from a broken head! I heard that thou wast the tiger-hearted one who smote the Sahib. Let him dream a little longer. Stay!'

'Hillwoman,' said Kim, with austerity that could not harden the outlines of his young oval face, 'these matters are too high for thee.'

'The Gods be good to us! Since when have men and women been other than men and women?'

'A priest is a priest. He says he will go upon this hour. I am his chela, and I go with him. We need food for the Road. He is an honoured guest in all the villages, but'—he broke into a pure boyish grin—'the food here is good. Give me some.'

'What if I do not give it thee? I am the woman of this village.'

'Then I curse thee—a little—not greatly, but enough to remember.' He could not help smiling.

'Thou hast cursed me already by the down-dropped eyelash and the uplifted chin. Curses? What should I care for mere words?' She clenched her hands upon her bosom. . . . 'But I would not have thee to go in anger, thinking hardly of me—a gatherer of cow-

dung and grass at Shamlegh, but still a woman of substance.'

'I think nothing,' said Kim, 'but that I am grieved to go, for I am very tired, and that we need food. Here is the bag.'

The woman snatched it angrily. 'I was foolish,' said she. 'Who is thy woman in the Plains? Fair or black? I was fair once. Laughest thou? Once, long ago, if thou canst believe, a Sahib looked on me with favour. Once, long ago, I wore European clothes at the Mission-house yonder.' She pointed towards Kotgarh. 'Once, long ago, I was Ker-lis-ti-an and spoke English—as the Sahibs speak it. Yes. My Sahib said he would return and wed me—yes, wed me. He went away—I had nursed him when he was sick—but he never returned. Then I saw that the Gods of the Kerlistians lied, and I went back to my own people. . . . I have never set eyes on a Sahib since. (Do not laugh at me. The fit is past, little priestling.) Thy face and thy walk and thy fashion of speech put me in mind of my Sahib, though thou art only a wandering mendicant to whom I give a dole. Curse me? Thou canst neither curse nor bless!'. She set her hands on her hips and laughed bitterly. 'Thy Gods are lies; thy works are lies; thy words are lies. There are no Gods under all the heavens. I know it. . . . But for a while I thought it was my Sahib come back, and he was my God. Yes, once I made music on a pianno in the Mission-house at Kotgarh. Now I give alms to priests who are heathen.' She wound up with the English word, and tied the mouth of the brimming bag.

'I wait for thee, chela,' said the lama, leaning against the door-post.

KIM

The woman swept the tall figure with her eyes. ‘He walk? He cannot cover half a mile. Whither would old bones go?’

At this Kim, already perplexed by the lama’s collapse, and foreseeing the weight of the bag, fairly lost his temper.

‘What is it to thee, woman of ill-omen, where he goes?’

‘Nothing—but something to thee, priest with a Sahib’s face. Wilt thou carry him on thy shoulders?’

‘I go to the Plains. None must hinder my return. I have wrestled with my soul till I am strengthless. The stupid body is spent, and we are far from the Plains.’

‘Behold!’ she said simply, and drew aside to let Kim see his own utter helplessness. ‘Curse me. May be it will give him strength. Make a charm! Call on thy great God. Thou art a priest.’ She turned away.

The lama had squatted limply, still holding by the door-post. One cannot strike down an old man that he recovers again like a boy in a night. Weakness bowed him to the earth, but his eyes that hung on Kim were alive and imploring.

‘It is all well,’ said Kim. ‘It is the thin air that weakens thee. In a little while we go! It is the mountain-sickness. I too am a little sick at stomach,’ . . . and he knelt and comforted with such poor words as came first to his lips. Then the woman returned, more erect than ever.

‘Thy Gods useless, heh? Try mine. I am the Woman of Shamlegh.’ She hailed hoarsely, and there came out of a cow-pen her two husbands and three others with a dooli, the rude native litter of the Hills, that they use for carrying the sick and for visits of state. ‘These cattle,’ she did not condescend to look at them, ‘are thine for so long as thou shalt need.’

'But we will not go Simla-way. We will not go near the Sahibs,' cried the first husband.

'They will not run away as the others did, nor will they steal baggage. Two I know for weaklings. Stand to the rear-pole, Sonoo and Taree.' They obeyed swiftly. 'Lower now, and lift in that holy man. I will see to the village and your virtuous wives till ye return.'

'When will that be?'

'Ask the priests. Do not pester me. Lay the food-bag at the foot, it balances better so.'

'Oh, Holy One, thy Hills are kinder than our Plains!' cried Kim, relieved, as the lama tottered to the litter. 'It is a very king's bed—a place of honour and ease. And we owe it to—'

'A woman of ill-omen. I need thy blessings as much as I do thy curses. It is my order and none of thine. Lift and away! Here! Hast thou money for the road?'

She beckoned Kim to her hut, and stooped above a battered English cash-box under her cot.

'I do not need anything,' said Kim, angered where he should have been grateful. 'I am already rudely loaded with favours.'

She looked up with a curious smile and laid a hand on his shoulder. 'At least, thank me. I am foul-faced and a hillwoman, but, as thy talk goes, I have acquired merit. Shall I show thee how the Sahibs render thanks?' and her hard eyes softened.

'I am but a wandering priest,' said Kim, his eyes lighting in answer. 'Thou needest neither my blessings nor my curses.'

'Nay. But for one little moment—thou canst overtake the dooli in ten strides—if thou wast a Sahib, shall I show thee what thou wouldst do?'

KIM

'How if I guess, though?' said Kim, and putting his arm round her waist, he kissed her on the cheek, adding in English: 'Thank you verree much, my dear.'

Kissing is practically unknown among Asiatics, which may have been the reason that she leaned back with wide-open eyes and a face of panic.

'Next time,' Kim went on, 'you must not be so sure of your heatthen priests. Now I say good-bye.' He held out his hand English-fashion. She took it mechanically. 'Good-bye, my dear.'

'Good-bye, and—and'—she was remembering her English words one by one—'you will come back again? Good-bye, and—thee God bless you.'

Half an hour later, as the creaking litter jolted up the hill path that leads south-easterly from Shamlegh, Kim saw a tiny figure at the hut door waving a white rag.

'She has acquired merit beyond all others,' said the lama. 'For to set a man upon the way to Freedom is half as great as though she had herself found it.'

'Umm,' said Kim thoughtfully, considering the past. 'It may be that I have acquired merit also. . . . At least she did not treat me like a child.' He hitched the front of his robe, where lay the slab of documents and maps, restowed the precious food-bag at the lama's feet, laid his hand on the litter edge, and buckled down to the slow pace of the grunting husbands.

'These also acquire merit,' said the lama, after three miles.

'More than that, they shall be paid in silver,' quoth Kim. The Woman of Shamlegh had given it to him; and it was only fair, he argued, that her men should earn it back again.

CHAPTER XV

I'd not give room for an Emperor—

I'd hold my road for a King.

To the Triple Crown I'd not bow down—

But this is a different thing!

I'll not fight with the Powers of Air—

Sentries pass him through!

Drawbridge let fall—He's the Lord of us all—

The Dreamer whose dream came true!

‘The Siege of the Fairies.’

Two hundred miles north of Chini, on the blue shale of Ladakh, lies Yankling Sahib, the merry-minded man, spy-glassing wrathfully across the ridges for some sign of his pet tracker—a man from Ao-chung. But that renegade, with a new Mannlicher rifle and two hundred cartridges, is elsewhere, shooting musk-deer for the market, and Yankling Sahib will learn next season how very ill he has been.

Up the valleys of Bushahr—the far-beholding eagles of the Himalayas swerve at his new blue-and-white gored umbrella—hurries a Bengali, once fat and well-looking, now lean and weather-worn. He has received the thanks of two foreigners of distinction, piloted not unskilfully to Mashobra tunnel which leads to the great and gay capital of India. It was not his fault that, blanketed by wet mists, he conveyed them past the

KIM

telegraph-station and European colony of Kotgarh. It was not his fault, but that of the Gods, of whom he discoursed so engagingly, that he led them into the borders of Nahan, where the Rajah of that state mistook them for deserting British soldiery. Hurree Babu explained the greatness and glory, in their own country, of his companions, till the drowsy kinglet smiled. He explained it to every one who asked—many times—aloud—variously. He begged food, arranged accommodation, proved a skilful leech for an injury of the groin—such a blow as one may receive rolling down a rock-covered hillside in the dark—and in all things indispensable. The reason of his friendliness did him credit. With millions of fellow-serfs, he had learned to look upon Russia as the great deliverer from the North. He was a fearful man. He had been afraid that he could not save his illustrious employers from the anger of an excited peasantry. He himself would just as lief hit a holy man as not, but. . . . He was deeply grateful and sincerely rejoiced that he had done his ‘little possible’ towards bringing their venture to—barring the lost baggage—a successful issue. He had forgotten the blows; denied that any blows had been dealt that unseemly first night under the pines. He asked neither pension nor retaining fee, but, if they deemed him worthy, would they write him a testimonial? It might be useful to him later, if others, their friends, came over the Passes. He begged them to remember him in their future greatnesses, for he ‘opined subtly’ that he, even he, Mohendro Lal Dutt, M. A. of Calcutta, had ‘done the state some service.’

They gave him a certificate praising his courtesy, helpfulness, and unerring skill as a guide. He put it in

his waist-belt and sobbed with emotion; they had endured so many dangers together. He led them at high noon along crowded Simla Mall to the Alliance Bank of Simla, where they wished to establish their identity. Thence he vanished like a dawn-cloud on Jakko.

Behold him, too fine drawn to sweat, too pressed to vaunt the drugs in his little brass-bound box, ascending Shamlegh slope, a just man made perfect. Watch him, all Babudom laid aside, smoking at noon on a cot, while a woman with turquoise-studded head-gear points south-easterly across the bare grass. Litters, she says, do not travel as fast as single men, but his birds should now be in the Plains. The holy man would not stay though Lispeth pressed him. The Babu groans heavily, girds up his huge loins, and is off again. He does not care to travel after dusk; but his days' marches—there is none to enter them in a book—would astonish folk who mock at his race. Kindly villagers, remembering the Dacca drug-vendor of two months ago, give him shelter against evil spirits of the wood. He dreams of Bengali Gods, University text-books of education, and the Royal Society, London, England. Next dawn the bobbing blue-and-white umbrella goes forward.

On the edge of the Doon, Mussoorie well behind them and the Plains spread out in golden dust before, rests a worn litter in which—all the Hills know it—lies a sick lama who seeks a River for his healing. Villages have almost come to blows over the honour of bearing it, for not only has the lama given them blessings, but his disciple good money—full one-third Sahibs' prices. Twelve miles a day has the dooli travelled, as the greasy, rubbed pole-ends show, and by roads that few Sahibs use. Over the Nilang Pass in storm when the driven snow-

dust filled every fold of the impassive lama's drapery; between the black horns of Raieng where they heard the whistle of the wild goats through the clouds; pitching and strained on the shale below; hard-held between shoulder and clenched jaw when they rounded the hideous curves of the Cut Road under Bhagirati; swinging and creaking to the steady jog-trot of the descent into the Valley of the Waters; pressed along the steamy levels of that locked valley; up, up and out again, to meet the roaring gusts off Kedarnath; set down of mid-days in the dun gloom of kindly oak-forests; passed from village to village in dawn-chill, when even devotees may be forgiven for swearing at impatient holy men; or by torchlight, when the least fearful think of ghosts—the dooli has reached her last stage. The little hill-folk sweat in the modified heat of the lower Sewaliks, and gather round the priests for their blessing and their wage.

'Ye have acquired merit,' says the lama. 'Merit greater than your knowing. And ye will return to the Hills,' he sighs.

'Surely. The high hills as soon as may be.' The bearer rubs his shoulder, drinks water, spits it out again, and readjusts his grass sandal. Kim—his face is drawn and tired—pays very small silver from his belt, heaves out the food-bag, crams an oilskin packet—they are holy writings—into his bosom, and helps the lama to his feet. The peace has come again into the old man's eyes, and he does not look for the hills to fall down and crush him as he did that terrible night when they were delayed by the flooded river.

The men pick up the dooli and swing out of sight between the scrub clumps.

KIM

The lama raises a hand toward the rampart of the Himalayas. ‘Not with you, O blessed among all hills, fell the Arrow of Our Lord! And never shall I breathe your air again!’

‘But thou art ten times the stronger man in this good air,’ says Kim, for to his wearied soul appeal the well-cropped, kindly plains. ‘Here, or hereabouts, fell the Arrow, yes. We will go very softly, perhaps a kos a day, for the Search is sure. But the bag weighs heavy.’

‘Ay, our Search is sure. I have come out of great temptation.’

It was never more than a couple of miles a day now, and Kim’s shoulders bore all the weight of it—the burden of an old man, the burden of the heavy food-bag with the locked books, the load of the writings on his heart, and the details of the daily routine. He begged in the dawn, set blankets for the lama’s meditation, held the weary head on his lap through the noon-day heats, fanning away the flies till his wrist ached, begged again in the evenings, and rubbed the lama’s feet, who rewarded him with promise of Freedom—to-day, to-morrow, or, at furthest, the next day.

‘Never was such a chela. I doubt at times whether Ananda more faithfully nursed Our Lord. And thou art a Sahib? When I was a man—a long time ago—I forgot that. Now I look upon thee often, and every time I remember that thou art a Sahib. It is strange.’

‘Thou hast said there is neither black nor white. Why plague me with this talk, Holy One? Let me rub the other foot. It vexes me. I am not a Sahib. I am thy chela, and my head is heavy on my shoulders.’

‘Patience a little! We reach Freedom together.

KIM

Then thou and I, upon the far bank of the River, will look back upon our lives as in the Hills we saw our days' marches laid out behind us. Perhaps I was once a Sahib.'

'Was never a Sahib like thee, I swear it.'

'I am certain the Keeper of the Images in the Wonder House was in past life a very wise abbot. But even his spectacles do not make my eyes see. There fall shadows when I would look steadily. No matter—we know the tricks of the poor stupid carcass—shadow changing to another shadow. I am bound by the illusion of Time and Space. How far came we to-day in the flesh?'

'Perhaps half a kos.' Three-quarters of a mile, and it was a weary march.

'Half a kos. Ha! I went ten thousand thousand in the spirit. How we are all lapped and swathed and swaddled in these senseless things.' He looked at his thin blue-veined hand that found the beads so heavy
'Chela, hast thou never a wish to leave me?'

Kim thought of the oilskin packet and the books in the food-bag. If some one duly authorised would only take delivery of them the Great Game might play itself for aught he then cared. He was tired and hot in his head, and a cough that came from the stomach worried him.

'No,' he said almost sternly. 'I am not a dog or a snake to bite when I have learned to love.'

'Thou art too tender for me.'

'Not that either. I have moved in one matter without consulting thee. I have sent a message to the Kulu woman by that woman who gave us the goat's milk this morn, saying that thou wast a little feeble and would need a litter. I beat myself in my mind that I did not

do it when we entered the Doon. We stay in this place till the litter returns.'

'I am content. She is a woman with a heart of gold, as thou sayest, but a talker—something of a talker.'

'She will not weary thee. I have looked to that also. Holy One, my heart is very heavy for my many carelessnesses towards thee.' An hysterical catch rose in his throat. 'I have walked thee too far; I have not picked good food always for thee; I have not considered the heat; I have talked to people on the road and left thee alone. . . . I have—I have . . . Hai mai! But I love thee . . . and it is all too late. . . . I was a child. . . . Oh why was I not a man! . . .' Overborne by strain, fatigue, and the weight beyond his years, Kim broke down and sobbed at the lama's feet.

'What a to-do is here,' said the old man gently. 'Thou hast never stepped a hair's breadth from the Way of Obedience. Neglect me? Child, I have lived on thy strength as an old tree lives on the lime of a new wall. Day by day since Shamlegh down, I have stolen strength from thee. Therefore, not through any sin of thine art thou weakened. It is the Body—the silly, stupid Body—that speaks now. Not the assured Soul. Be comforted! Know at least the devils that thou fightest. They are earth-born—children of illusion. We will go to the woman from Kulu. She shall acquire merit in housing us, and specially in tending me. Thou shalt run free till strength returns. I had forgotten the stupid Body. If there be any blame, I bear it. But we are too close to the Gates of Deliverance to weigh blame. I could praise thee, but what need? In a little—in a very little—we shall sit beyond all needs.'

KIM

And so he petted and comforted Kim with wise saws and grave texts on that little-understood beast, our Body, who, being but a delusion, insists on posing as the Soul, to the darkening of the Way, and the immense multiplication of unnecessary devils.

'Hai! hai! Let us talk of the woman from Kulu. Think you she will ask another charm for her grandsons? When I was a young man, a very long time ago, I was plagued with these vapours—and some others—and I went to an abbot—a very holy man and a seeker after truth, though then I knew it not. Sit up and listen, child of my soul! My tale was told. Said he to me, "Chela, know this. There are many lies in the world, and not a few liars, but there are no liars like our bodies, except it be the sensations of our bodies." Considering this I was comforted, and of his great favour he suffered me to drink tea in his presence. Suffer me now to drink tea, for I am thirsty.'

With a laugh above his tears, Kim kissed the lama's feet, and went about tea-making.

'Thou leanest on me in the body, Holy One, but I lean on thee for some other things. Dost know it?'

'I have guessed maybe,' and the lama's eyes twinkled. 'We must change that.'

So, when with scufflings and scrapings and a hot air of importance, paddled up nothing less than the Sahiba's pet palanquin sent twenty miles, with that same grizzled old Oorya servant in charge, and when they reached the disorderly order of the long white rambling house behind Saharunpore, the lama took his own measures.

Said the Sahiba cheerily from an upper window, after compliments: 'What is the good of an old woman's advice to an old man? I told thee—I told thee, Holy

KIM

One, to keep an eye upon the chela. How didst thou do it? Never answer me! I know. He has been running among the women. Look at his eyes—hollow and sunk—and the Betraying Line from the nose down! He has been sifted out! Fie! Fie! And a priest, too!

Kim looked up over-weary to smile, shaking his head in denial.

‘Do not jest,’ said the lama. ‘That time is done. We are here upon great matters. A sickness of soul took me in the Hills, and him a sickness of the body. Since then I have lived upon his strength—eating him.’

‘Children together—young and old,’ she sniffed, but forbore to make any new jokes. ‘May this present hospitality restore ye. Hold awhile and I will come to gossip of the high good hills.’

At evening time—her son-in-law was returned, so she did not need to go on inspection round the farm—she won to the meat of the matter, explained low-voicedly by the lama. The two old heads nodded wisely together. Kim had reeled to a room with a cot in it, and was dozing suddenly. The lama had forbidden him to set blankets or get food.

‘I know—I know. Who but I?’ she cackled. ‘We who go down to the burning-ghats clutch at the hands of those coming up from the River of Life with full water-jars—yes, brimming water-jars. I did the boy wrong. He lent thee his strength? It is true that the old eat the young daily. ’Stands now we must restore him.’

‘Thou hast many times acquired merit—’

‘My merit. What is it? Old bag of bones making curries for men who do not ask “Who cooked this?” Now if it were stored up for my grandson—’

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‘He that had the belly-pain?’

‘To think the Holy One remembers that! I must tell his mother. It is most singular honour! “He that had the belly-pain”—straightway the Holy One remembered. She will be proud.’

‘My chela is to me as a son to the unenlightened.’

‘Say grandson, rather. Mothers have not the wisdom of our years. If a child cries they say the heavens are falling. Now a grandmother is far enough separated from the pain of bearing and the pleasure of giving the breast to consider whether a cry is wickedness pure or the wind. And since thou speakest once again of wind, when last the Holy One was here, maybe I offended in pressing for charms.’

‘Sister,’ said the lama, using that form of address a Buddhist monk may sometimes employ towards a nun, ‘if charms comfort thee—’

‘They are better than ten thousand doctors.’

‘I say, if they comfort thee, I who was Abbot of Suchzen will make as many as thou mayest desire. I have never seen thy face—’

‘That even the monkeys who steal our loquats count for a gain. Hee! hee!’

‘But as he who sleeps there said,’ he nodded at the shut door of the guest-chamber across the forecourt, ‘thou hast a heart of gold. . . . And he is in the spirit my very “grandson” to me.’

‘Good! I am the Holy One’s cow.’ This was pure Hinduism, but the lama never heeded. ‘I am old. I have borne sons in the body. Oh, once I could please men! Now I can cure them.’ He heard her armlets tinkle as though she bared arms for action. ‘I will take over the boy and dose him, and stuff him, and make him

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all whole. Hai! hai! We old people know something yet.'

Wherefore when Kim, aching in every bone, opened his eyes, and would go to the cook-house to get his master's food, he found strong coercion about him, and a veiled old figure at the door, flanked by the grizzled manservant, who told him precisely the very things that he was on no account to do.

'Thou must have? Thou shalt have nothing. What? A locked box in which to keep holy books? Oh, that is another matter. Heavens forbid I should come between a priest and his prayers! It shall be brought, and thou shalt keep the key.'

They pushed the coffer under his cot, and Kim shut away Mahbub's pistol, the oilskin packet of letters, and the locked books and diaries, with a groan of relief. For some absurd reason their weight on his shoulders was nothing to their weight on his poor mind. His neck ached under it of nights.

'Thine is a sickness uncommon in youth these days: since young folk have given up tending their betters. The remedy is sleep, and certain drugs,' said the Sahiba; and he was glad to give himself up to the blankness that half menaced and half soothed him.

She brewed drinks, in some mysterious Asiatic equivalent to the still-room—drenches that smelt pestilently and tasted worse. She stood over Kim till they went down, and inquired exhaustively after they had come up. She laid a taboo upon the forecourt, and enforced it by means of an armed man. It is true he was seventy odd, that his scabbarded sword ceased at the hilt; but he represented the authority of the Sahiba, and loaded wains, chattering servants, calves, dogs, hens, and the

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like, fetched a wide compass by those parts. Best of all, when the body was cleared, she cut out from the mass of poor relations that crowded the back of the buildings—household dogs, we name them—a cousin's widow, skilled in what Europeans, who know nothing about it, call massage. And the two of them, laying him east and west, that the mysterious earth-currents which thrill the clay of our bodies might help and not hinder, took him to pieces all one long afternoon—bone by bone, muscle by muscle, ligament by ligament, and lastly, nerve by nerve. Kneaded to irresponsible pulp, half hypnotised by the perpetual flick and readjustment of the uneasy chudders that veiled their eyes, Kim slid ten thousand miles into slumber—thirty-six hours of it—sleep that soaked like rain after drought.

Then she fed him, and the house spun to her clamour. She caused fowls to be slain; she sent for vegetables, and the sober, slow-thinking gardener, nigh as old as she, sweated for it; she took spices, and milk, and onion, with little fish from the brooks—anon limes for sherbets, fat quails of the pit, then chicken-livers upon a skewer, with sliced ginger between.

'I have seen something of this world,' she said over the crowded trays, 'and there are but two sorts of women in it—those who take the strength out of a man and those who put it back. Once I was that one, and now I am this. Nay—do not play the priestling with me. Mine was but a jest. If it does not hold good now, it will when thou takest the road again. Cousin'—this to the poor relation, never wearied of extolling her patroness's charity—'he is getting a bloom on the skin of a new-curried horse. Our work is like polishing jewels to be thrown to a dance-girl—eh?'

Kim sat up and smiled. The terrible weakness had dropped from him like an old shoe. His tongue itched for free speech again, and but a week back the lightest word clogged it like ashes. The pain in his neck (he must have caught it from the lama) had gone with the heavy dengue-aches and the evil taste in the mouth. The two old women, a little, but not much, more careful about their veils now, clucked as merrily as the hens that had entered pecking through the open door.

‘Where is my Holy One?’ he demanded.

‘Hear him! Thy Holy One is well,’ she snapped viciously. ‘Though that is none of his merit. Knew I a charm to make him wise, I’d sell my jewels and buy it. To refuse good food that I cooked myself—and go roving into the fields for two nights on an empty belly—and to tumble into a brook at the end of it—call you that holiness? Then, when he has nearly broken what thou hast left of my heart with anxiety, he tells me that he has acquired merit. Oh, how like are all men! No, that was not it—he tells me that he is freed from all sin. I could have told him that before he wetted himself all over. He is well now—this happened a week ago—but burn me such holiness! A babe of three would do better. Do not fret thyself for the Holy One. He keeps both eyes on thee when he is not wading our brooks.’

‘I do not remember to have seen him. I remember that the days and nights passed like bars of white and black, opening and shutting. I was not sick: I was only tired.’

‘A lethargy that comes by right some few score years later. But it is all done now.’

‘Maharanee,’ Kim began, but led by the look in her eye, changed it to the title of plain love—‘Mother, I owe

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my life to thee. How shall I make thanks? Ten thousand blessings upon thy house and—'

'The house be unblessed.' (It is impossible to give exactly the old lady's word.) 'Thank the Gods as a priest if thou wilt, but thank me if thou carest as a son. Heavens above! Have I shifted thee and lifted thee and slapped and twisted thy ten toes to find texts flung at my head? Somewhere a mother must have borne thee to break her heart. What used thou to her—son?'

'I had no mother, my mother,' said Kim. 'She died, they tell me, when I was young.'

'Hai mai! Then none can say I have robbed her of any right if—when thou takest the road again and this house is but one of a thousand used for shelter and forgotten, after an easy-flung blessing. No matter. I need no blessings, but—but—' She stamped her foot at the poor relation: 'Take up the trays to the house. What is the good of stale food in the room, oh woman of ill-omen?'

'I ha—have borne a son in my time too, but he died,' whimpered the bowed sister-figure behind the chudder. 'Thou knowest he died! I only waited for the order to take away the tray.'

'It is I that am the woman of ill-omen,' cried the old lady penitently. 'We that go down to the chatris (the big umbrellas above the burning-ghats where the priests take their last dues) clutch hard at the bearers of the chattis (water-jars—young folk full of the pride of life, she meant; but the pun is clumsy). When one cannot dance in the festival one must e'en look out of the window, and grandmothering takes all a woman's time. Thy master gives me all the charms I now desire for my daughter's eldest, by reason—is it?—that he is

wholly free from sin. The hakim is brought very low these days. He goes about poisoning my servants for lack of their betters.'

'What hakim, mother?'

'That very Dacca man who gave me the pill which rent me in three pieces. He cast up like a strayed camel a week ago, vowing that he and thou had been blood-brothers together up Kulu-way, and feigning great anxiety for thy health. He was very thin and hungry, so I gave orders to have him stuffed too—him and his anxiety!'

'I would see him if he is here.'

'He eats five times a day, and lances boils for my hinds to save himself from an apoplexy. He is so full of anxiety for thy health that he sticks to the cook-house door and stays himself with scraps. He will keep. We shall never get rid of him.'

'Send him here, mother'—the twinkle returned to Kim's eye for a flash—'and I will try.'

'I'll send him, but to chase him off is an ill turn. At least he had the sense to fish the Holy One out of the brook; thus, as the Holy One did not say, acquiring merit.'

'He is a very wise hakim. Send him mother.'

'Priest praising priest? A miracle! If he is any friend of thine (ye squabbled at your last meeting) I'll hale him here with horse-ropes and—and give him a caste-dinner afterwards, my son. . . . Get up and see the world! This lying abed is the mother of seventy devils . . . my son! my son!'

She trotted forth to raise a typhoon off the cook-house, and almost on her shadow rolled in the Babu, robed as to the shoulders like a Roman emperor, jowled like

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Titus, bareheaded, with new patent-leather shoes, in highest condition of fat, exuding joy and salutations.

'By Jove, Mister O'Hara, but I am jolly glad to see you. I will kindly shut the door. It is a pity you are sick. Are you very sick?'

'The papers—the papers from the kilta. The maps and the murasla!' He held out the key impatiently; for the present need on his soul was to get rid of the loot.

'You are quite right That is correct departmental view to take. You have got everything?'

'All that was handwritten in the kilta I took. The rest I threw down the hill.' He could hear the key's grate in the lock, the sticky pull of the slow-rending oil-cloth, and a quick shuffling of papers. He had been annoyed out of all reason by the knowledge that they lay below him through the sick idle days—a burden incommunicable. For that reason the blood tingled through his body, when Hurree, skipping elephantinely, shook hands again.

'This is fine! This is finest! Mister O'Hara! You have—ha! ha!—swiped the whole bag of tricks—locks, stocks, and barrels. They told me it was eight months' work gone up the spouts! By Jove, how they beat me! . . . Look, here is the letter from Hilas!' He intoned a line or two of Court Persian, which is the language of authorised and unauthorised diplomacy. 'Mister Rajah Sahib has just about put his foot in the holes. He will have to explain offecially how the deuce-an'-all he is writing love-letters to the Czar. And they are very clever maps . . . and there is three or four Prime Ministers of these parts implicated by the correspondence. By Gad, Sar! The British Government will change the succession in Hilas and

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Bunar, and nominate new heirs to the throne. "Treason most base" . . . but you do not understand? Eh?"

'Are they in thy hands?' said Kim. It was all he cared for.

'Just you jolly well bet yourself they are.' He stowed the entire trove about his body, as only Orientals can. 'They are going up to the office, too. The old lady thinks I am permanent fixture here, but I shall go away with these straight off—immediately. Mr. Lurgan will be proud man. You are officially subordinate to me, but I shall embody your name in my verbal report. It is a pity we are not allowed written reports. We Bengalis excel in thee exact science.' He tossed back the key and showed the box empty.

'Good. That is good. I was very tired. My Holy One was sick, too. And did he fall into—'

'Oah yess. I am his good friend, I tell you. He was behaving very strange when I came down after you, and I thought perhaps he might have the papers. I followed him on his meditations, and to discuss ethnological points also. You see, I am verree small person here nowadays, in comparison with all his charms. By Jove, O'Hara, do you know, he is afflicted with infirmity of fits. Yess, I tell you. Cataleptic, too, if not also epileptic. I found him in such a state under a tree in articulo mortem, and he jumped up and walked into a brook and he was nearly drowned but for me. I pulled him out.'

'Because I was not there!' said Kim. 'He might have died.'

'Yes, he might have died, but he is dry now, and asserts he has undergone transfiguration.' The Babu

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tapped his forehead knowingly. ‘I took notes of his statements for Royal Society—in posse. You must make haste and be quite well and come back to Simla, and I will tell you all my tale at Lurgan’s. It was splendid. The bottoms of their trousers were quite torn, and old Nahan Rajah, he thought they were European soldiers deserting.’

‘Oh, the Russians? How long were they with thee?’

‘One was a Frenchman. Oh, days and days and days! Now all the hill-people believe all Russians are all beggars. By Jove! they had not one dam-thing that I did not get them. And I told the common people—oah, such tales and anecdotes! I will tell you at old Lurgan’s when you come up. We will have—ah—a night out! It is feather in both our caps! Yess, and they gave me a certificate. That is creaming joke. You should have seen them at the Alliance Bank identifying themselves! And thank Almighty God you got their papers so well! You do not laugh verree much, but you shall laugh when you are well. Now I will go straight to the railway and get out. You shall have all sorts of credits for your game. When do you come along? We are very proud of you, though you gave us great frights. And especially Mahbub.’

‘Ay, Mahbub. And where is he?’

‘Selling horses in this vi-cinity, of course.’

‘Here! Why? Speak slowly. There is a thickness in my head still.’

The Babu looked shyly down his nose. ‘Well, you see, I am fearful man, and I do not like responsibility. You were sick, you see, and I did not know where deuce-an’-all the papers were, and if so, how many. So when I had come down here I slipped in private wire to Mah-

bub—he was at Meerut for races—and I tell him how case stands. He comes up with his men and he consorts with the lama, and then he calls me a fool, and is very rude—'

‘But wherefore—wherefore?’

‘That is what I ask. I only suggest that if any one steals the papers I should like some good strong, brave men to rob them back again. You see they are vitally important, and Mahbub Ali he did not know where you were.’

‘Mahbub Ali to rob the Sahiba’s house? Thou art mad, Babu,’ said Kim with indignation.

‘I wanted the papers. Suppose she had stole them? It was only practical suggestion, I think. You are not pleased, eh?’

A native proverb—unquotable—showed the blackness of Kim’s disapproval.

‘Well,—Hurree shrugged his shoulders,—‘there is no accounting for thee taste. Mahbub was angry too. He has sold horses all about here, and he says old lady is pukka (thorough) old lady and would not condescend to such ungentlemanly things. I do not care. I have got the papers, and I was very glad of moral support from Mahbub. I tell you I am fearful man, but, somehow or other, the more fearful I am the more dam-tight places I get into. So I was glad you came with me to Chini, and I am glad Mahbub was close by. The old lady she is sometimes very rude to me and my beautiful pills.’

‘Allah be merciful,’ said Kim on his elbow, rejoicing. ‘What a beast of wonder is a Babu! And that man walked alone—if he did walk—with robbed and angry foreigners!’

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'Oah, thatt was nothing, after they had done beating me; but if I lost the papers it was pretty jolly serious. Mahbub he nearly beat me too, and he went and consort'd with the lama no end. I shall stick to ethnological investigations henceforwards. Now good-bye, Mister O'Hara. I can catch 4.25 p. m. to Umballa if I am quick. It will be good times when we all tell thee tale up at Mister Lurgan's. I shall report you offee-cially better. Good-bye, my dear fallow, and when next you are under thee emotions please do not use the Mohammedan terms with the Tibetan dress.'

He shook hands twice—a Babu to his boot-heels—and opened the door. With the fall of the sunlight upon his still triumphant face he returned to the humble Dacca quack.

'He robbed them,' thought Kim, forgetting his own share in the game. 'He tricked them. He lied to them like a Bengali. They give him a chit (a testimonial). He makes them a mock at the risk of his life—I never would have gone down to them after the pistol-shots—and then he says he is a fearful man. . . . And he is a fearful man. I must get into the world again.'

At first his legs bent like bad pipe-stems, and the flood and rush of the sunlit air dazzled him. He squatted by the white wall, the mind rummaging among the incidents of the long dooli journey, the lama's weaknesses, and, now that the stimulus of talk was removed, his own self-pity, of which, like the sick, he had great store. The unnerved brain edged away from all the outside, as a raw horse, once rowelled, sidles from the spur. It was enough, amply enough, that the spoil of the kilta was away—off his hands—out of his possession. He tried to think of the lama,—to wonder why he had tum-

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bled into a brook,—but the bigness of the world, seen between the forecourt gates, swept linked thought aside. Then he looked upon the trees and the broad fields, with the thatched huts hidden among crops—looked with strange eyes unable to take up the size and proportion and use of things—stared for a still half-hour. All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar-crusher laid by in a corner. The breezes fanned over him, the parrots shrieked at him, the noises of the populated house behind—squabbles, orders, and reproofs—hit on dead ears.

‘I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?’ His soul repeated it again and again.

He did not want to cry,—had never felt less like crying in his life,—but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less. He shook himself like a dog with a flea in his ear, and rambled out of the gate. Said the Sahiba, to whom watchful eyes reported this move: ‘Let him go. I have done my share. Mother Earth must do the rest. When the Holy One comes back from meditation, tell him.’

There stood an empty bullock-cart on a little knoll half a mile away, with a young banian tree behind—a

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look-out, as it were, above some new-ploughed levels; and his eyelids, bathed in soft air, grew heavy as he neared it. The ground was good clean dust—no new herbage that, living, is half-way to death already, but the hopeful dust that holds the seed of all life. He felt it between his toes, patted it with his palms, and joint by joint, sighing luxuriously, laid him down full length along in the shadow of the wooden-pinned cart. And Mother Earth was as faithful as the Sahiba. She breathed through him to restore the poise he had lost lying so long on a cot cut off from her good currents. His head lay powerless upon her breast, and his opened hands surrendered to her strength. The many-rooted tree above him, and even the dead man-handled wood beside, knew what he sought, as he himself did not know. Hour upon hour he lay deeper than sleep.

Towards evening, when the dust of returning kine made all the horizons smoke, came the lama and Mah-bub Ali, both afoot, walking cautiously, for the house had told them where he had gone.

‘Allah! What a fool’s trick to play in open country,’ muttered the horse-dealer. ‘He could be shot a hundred times—but this is not the Border.’

‘And,’ said the lama, repeating a many-times-told tale, ‘never was such a chela. Temperate, kindly, wise, of ungrudging disposition, a merry heart upon the road, never forgetting, learned, truthful, courteous. Great is his reward!’

‘I know the boy—as I have said.’

‘And he was all those things?’

‘Some of them—but I have not yet found a Red Hat’s charm for making him overly truthful. He has certainly been well nursed.’

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‘The Sahiba is a heart of gold,’ said the lama earnestly.
‘She looks upon him as her son.’

‘Hmph! Half Hind seems that-way disposed. I only wished to see that the boy had come to no harm and was a free agent. As thou knowest, he and I were old friends in the first days of your pilgrimage together.’

‘That is a bond between us.’ The lama sat down.
‘We are at the end of the pilgrimage.’

‘No thanks to thee thine was not cut off for good and all a week back. I heard what the Sahiba said to thee when we bore thee up on the cot.’ Mahbub laughed, and tugged his newly-dyed beard.

‘I was meditating upon other matters that tide. It was the hakim from Dacca broke my meditations.’

‘Otherwise’—this was in Pashtu for decency’s sake—‘thou wouldest have ended thy meditations upon the sultry side of Hell—being an unbeliever and an idolater for all thy child’s simplicity. But now, Red Hat, what is to be done?’

‘This very night,—the words came slowly, vibrating with triumph,—‘this very night he will be as free as I am from all taint of sin—assured as I am when he quits this body of Freedom from the Wheel of Things. I have a sign,’ he laid his hand above the torn chart in his bosom, ‘that my time is short; but I shall have safeguarded him throughout the years. Remember, I have reached Knowledge, as I told thee only three nights back.’

‘It must be true, as the Tirah priest said when I stole his cousin’s wife, that I am a sufi (a freethinker); for here I sit,’ said Mahbub to himself, ‘drinking in blasphemy unthinkable. . . . I remember the tale. On that, then, he goes to Jannatu l’Adn (the Gardens of

Eden). But how? Wilt thou slay him or drown him in that wonderful river from which the Babu dragged thee?’

‘I was dragged from no river,’ said the lama simply. ‘Thou hast forgotten what befell. I found it by knowledge.’

‘Oh, aye. True,’ stammered Mahbub, divided between high indignation and enormous mirth. ‘I had forgotten the exact run of what happened. Thou didst find it knowingly.’

‘And to say that I would take life is—not a sin, but a madness simple. My chela aided me to the River. It is his right to be cleansed from sin—with me.’

‘Ay, he needs cleansing. But afterwards, old man—afterwards?’

‘What matter under all the heavens? He is sure of Nibban—enlightened—as I am.’

‘Well said. I had a fear he might mount Mohammed’s Horse and fly away.’

‘Nay—he must go forth as a teacher.’

‘Aha! Now I see! That is the right gait for the colt. Certainly he must go forth as a teacher. He is somewhat urgently needed as a scribe by the State, for instance.’

‘To that end he was prepared. I acquired merit in that I gave alms for his sake. A good deed does not die. He aided me in my Search. I aided him in his. Just is the Wheel, O horse-seller from the North. Let him be a teacher; let him be a scribe—what matter? He will have attained Freedom at the end. The rest is illusion.’

‘What matter? When I must have him with me beyond Balkh in six months! I come up with ten lame

horses and three strong-backed men—thanks to that chicken of a Babu—to break a sick boy by force out of an old trot's house. It seems that I stand by while a young Sahib is hoisted into Allah knows what of an idolater's heaven by means of old Red Hat. And I am reckoned something of a player of the Game myself! But the madman is fond of the boy; and I must be very reasonably mad too.'

'What is the prayer?' said the lama, as the rough Pashtu rumbled into the red beard.

'No matter at all; but now I understand that the boy, sure of Paradise, can yet enter Government service, my mind is easier. I must get to my horses. It grows dark. Do not wake him. I have no wish to hear him call thee master.'

'But he is my disciple. What else?'

'He has told me.' Mahbub choked down his touch of spleen and rose laughing. 'I am not altogether of thy faith, Red Hat—if so small a matter concern thee.'

'It is nothing,' said the lama.

'I thought not. Therefore it will not move thee sinless, new-washed and three parts drowned to boot, when I call thee a good man—a very good man. We have talked together some four or five evenings now, and for all I am a horse-coper I can still, as the saying is, see holiness beyond the legs of a horse. Yea, can see, too, how our Friend of all the World put his hand in thine at the first. Use him well, and suffer him to return to the world as a teacher, when thou hast—bathed his legs, if that be the proper medicine for the colt.'

'Why not follow the Way thyself, and so accompany the boy?'

Mahbub stared stupefied at the magnificent insolence

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of the demand, which across the Border he would have paid with more than a blow. Then the humour of it touched his worldly soul.

‘Softly—softly—one foot at a time, as the lame gelding went over the Umballa jumps. I may come to Paradise later—I have workings that way—great motions—and I owe them to thy simplicity. Thou hast never lied?’

‘What need?’

‘O Allah, hear him! “What need” in this Thy world! Nor ever harmed a man?’

‘Once—with a pencease—before I was wise.’

‘So? I think the better of thee. Thy teachings are good. Thou hast turned one man that I know from the path of strife.’ He laughed immensely. ‘He came here open-minded to commit a dacoity (a house-robbery with violence). Yes, to cut, rob, kill, and carry off what he desired.’

‘A great foolishness!’

‘Oh! black shame too. So he thought after he had seen thee—and a few others, male and female. So he abandoned it; and now he goes to beat a big fat Babu man.’

‘I do not understand.’

‘Allah forbid it! Some men are strong in knowledge, Red Hat. Thy strength is stronger still. Keep it—I think thou wilt. If the boy be not a good servant, pull his ears off.’

With a hitch of his broad Bokhariot belt the Pathan swaggered off into the gloaming, and the lama came down from his clouds so far as to look at the broad back.

‘That person lacks courtesy, and is deceived by the shadow of appearances. But he spoke well of my chela, who now enters upon his reward. Let me make the

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prayer! . . . Wake, O fortunate above all born of women. Wake! It is found!

Kim came up from those deep wells, and the lama attended his yawning pleasure; duly snapping fingers to head off evil spirits.

'I have slept a hundred years. Where—? Holy One, hast thou been here long? I went out to look for thee, but'—he laughed drowsily—'I slept by the way. I am all well now. Hast thou eaten? Let us go to the house. It is many days since I tended thee. And the Sahiba fed thee well? Who shampooed thy legs? What of the weaknesses—the belly and the neck, and the beating in the ears?'

'Gone—all gone. Dost thou not know?'

'I know nothing, but that I have not seen thee in a monkey's age. Know what?'

'Strange the knowledge did not reach out to thee, when all my thoughts were theeward.'

'I cannot see the face, but the voice is like a gong. Has the Sahiba made a young man of thee by her cookery?'

He peered at the cross-legged figure, outlined jet-black against the lemon-coloured drift of light. So does the stone Bodhisat sit who looks down upon the patent self-registering turnstiles of the Lahore Museum.

The lama held his peace. Except for the click of the rosary and a faint 'clop-clop' of Mahbub's retreating feet, the soft, smoky silence of evening in India wrapped them close.

'Hear me! I bring news.'

'But let us—'

Out shot the long yellow hand compelling silence. Kim tucked his feet under his robe-edge obediently.

'Hear me! I bring news! The Search is finished. Comes now the Reward. . . . Thus. When we were among the Hills, I lived on thy strength till the young branch bowed and nigh broke. When we came out of the Hills, I was troubled for thee and for other matters which I held in my heart. The boat of my soul lacked direction; I could not see into the Cause of Things. So I gave thee over to the virtuous woman altogether. I took no food. I drank no water. Still I saw not the Way. They pressed food upon me and cried at my shut door. So I removed myself to a hollow under a tree. I took no food. I took no water. I sat in meditation two days and two nights, abstracting my mind; inbreathing and outbreathing in the required manner. . . . Upon the second night—so great was my reward—the wise Soul loosed itself from the silly Body and went free. This I have never before attained, though I have stood on the threshold of it. Consider, for it is a marvel!'

'A marvel indeed. Two days and two nights without food! Where was the Sahiba?' said Kim under his breath.

'Yea, my Soul went free, and, wheeling like an eagle, saw indeed that there was no Teshoo Lama nor any other soul. As a drop draws to water, so my soul drew near to the Great Soul which is beyond all things. At that point, exalted in contemplation, I saw all Hind, from Ceylon in the sea to the Hills, and my own Painted Rocks at Suchzen; I saw every camp and village, to the least, where we have ever rested. I saw them at one time and in one place; for they were within the Soul. By this I knew the Soul had passed beyond the illusion of Time and Space and of Things. By this I knew that

I was free. I saw thee lying in thy cot, and I saw thee falling down hill under the idolater—at one time, in one place, in my Soul, which, as I say, had touched the Great Soul. Also I saw the stupid body of Teshoo Lama lying down, and the hakim from Dacca kneeled beside, shouting in its ear. Then my Soul was all alone, and I saw nothing, for I was all things, having reached the Great Soul. And I meditated a thousand thousand years, passionless, well aware of the Causes of all Things. Then a voice cried: “What shall come to the boy if thou art dead?” and I was shaken back and forth in myself with pity for thee; and I said: “I will return to my chela, lest he miss the Way.” Upon this my Soul, which is the soul of Teshoo Lama, withdrew itself from the Great Soul with strivings and yearnings and retchings and agonies not to be told. As the egg from the fish, as the fish from the water, as the water from the cloud, as the cloud from the thick air; so put forth, so leaped out, so drew away, so fumed up the soul of Teshoo Lama from the Great Soul. Then a voice cried: “The River! Take heed to the River!” and I looked down upon all the world, which was as I had seen it before—one in time, one in place—and I saw plainly the River of the Arrow at my feet. At that hour my Soul was hampered by some evil or other whereof I was not wholly cleansed, and it lay upon my arms and coiled round my waist; but I put it aside, and I cast forth as an eagle in my flight for the very place of the River. I pushed aside world upon world for thy sake. I saw the River below me—the River of the Arrow—and, descending, the waters of it closed over me; and behold I was again in the body of Teshoo Lama, but free from sin, and the hakim from Dacca bore up my head in the waters of the

KIM

River. It is here! It is behind the mango-tope here—even here!’

‘Allah Karim! Oh, well that the Babu was by!
Wast thou very wet?’

‘Why should I regard? I remember the hakim was concerned for the body of Teshoo Lama. He haled it out of the holy water in his hands, and there came afterwards thy horse-seller from the North with a cot and men, and they put the body on the cot and bore it up to the Sahiba’s house.’

‘What said the Sahiba?’

‘I was meditating in that body, and did not hear. So thus the Search is ended. For the merit that I have acquired, the River of the Arrow is here. It broke forth at our feet, as I have said. I have found it. Son of my Soul, I have wrenched my Soul back from the Threshold of Freedom to free thee from all sin—as I am free, and sinless. Just is the Wheel! Certain is our deliverance. Come!’

He crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man may who has won Salvation for himself and his beloved.

THE END

THE NAULAHKA

THE NAULAHKA: A Story of West and East

I

NICHOLAS TARVIN sat in the moonlight on the unrailed bridge that crossed the irrigating ditch above Topaz, dangling his feet over the stream. A brown, sad-eyed little woman sat beside him, staring quietly at the moon. She was tanned with the tan of the girl who does not mind wind and rain and sun, and her eyes were sad with the settled melancholy of eyes that know big mountains, and seas of plain, and care, and life. The women of the West shade such eyes under their hands at sunset in their cabin-doors, scanning those hills or those grassless, treeless plains for the homecoming of their men. A hard life is always hardest for the woman.

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Kate Sheriff had lived with her face to the West and with her smouldering eyes fixed upon the wilderness since she could walk. She had advanced into the wilderness with the railroad. Until she had gone away to school, she had never lived where the railroad ran both ways. She had often stayed long enough at the end of a section with her family to see the first glimmering streaks of the raw dawn of civilisation, usually helped out by the electric light; but in the new and still newer lands to which her father's civil engineering orders called them from year to year there were not even arc lamps. There was a saloon under a tent, and there was the section-house, where they lived, and where her mother had sometimes taken to board the men employed by her husband. But it was not these influences alone that had produced the young woman of twenty-three who sat near Tarvin, and who had just told him gently that she liked him, but that she had a duty elsewhere.

This duty, as she conceived it, was, briefly, to spend her life in the East in the effort to better the condition of the women of India. It had come to her as an inspiration and a command two years before, toward the end of her second year at the St. Louis school, where she went to tie up the loose ends of the education she had given herself in lonely camps.

Kate's mission had been laid on her one April afternoon, warmed and sunned with the first breath of spring. The green trees, the swelling buds, and the sunlight outside had tempted her from the prospect of a lecture on India by a Hindu woman; and it was finally because it was a school duty not to be escaped that she listened to Pundita Ramabai's account of the sad case of her sisters at home. It was a heart-breaking story, and the girls,

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making the offerings begged from them in strange accents, went from it stilled and awed to the measure of their natures, and talked it over in the corridors in whispers, until a nervous giggle broke the tension, and they began chattering again.

Kate made her way from the hall with the fixed, inward-looking eye, the flaming cheek, and air-borne limbs of one on whom the Mantle of the Spirit has descended. She went quickly out into the school-garden, away from everybody, and paced the flower-bordered walks, exalted, rich, sure, happy. She had found herself! The flowers knew it, the tender-leaved trees overhead were aware, the shining sky had word. Her head was high; she wanted to dance, and, much more, she wanted to cry. A pulse in her forehead went beat, beat; the warm blood sang through her veins; she stopped every little while to take a deep draught of the good air. In those moments she dedicated herself.

All her life should take breath from this hour; she vowed it to the service this day revealed to her, as once to the prophets—vowed all her strength and mind and heart. The Angel of the Lord had laid a command upon her. She obeyed joyfully.

And now, after two years spent in fitting herself for her calling, she returned to Topaz, a capable and instructed nurse, on fire for her work in India, to find that Tarvin wished her to stay at Topaz and marry him.

‘You can call it what you like,’ Tarvin told her, while she gazed at the moon; ‘you can call it duty, or you can call it woman’s sphere, or you can call it, as that meddling missionary called it at church to-night, “carrying the light to them that sit in darkness.” I’ve no doubt you’ve got a halo to put to it; they’ve taught you names

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enough for things in the East. But for me, what I say is, it's a freeze-out.'

'Don't say that, Nick! It's a call.'

'You've got a call to stay at home; and if you haven't heard of it, I'm a committee to notify you,' said Tarvin doggedly. He shied a pebble into the irrigating ditch, and eyed the racing current with lowering brows.

'Dear Nick, how can you bear to urge any one who is free to stay at home and shirk after what we've heard to-night?'

'Well, by the holy smoke, some one has got to urge girls to stand by the old machine, these days! You girls are no good at all under the new regulations until you desert. It's the road to honour.'

'Desert!' gasped Kate. She turned her eyes on him.

'Well, what do you call it? That's what the little girl I used to know on Section 10 of the N. P. and Y. would have called it. O Kate dear, put yourself back in the old days; remember yourself then, remember what we used to be to each other, and see if you don't see it that way. You've got a father and mother, haven't you? You can't say it's the square thing to give them up. And you've got a man sitting beside you on this bridge who loves you for all he's worth—loves you, you dear old thing, for keeps. You used to like him a little bit too. Eh?"

He slid his arm about her as he spoke, and for a moment she let it rest there.

'Does that mean nothing to you either? Don't you seem to see a call here, too, Kate?'

He forced her to turn her face to him, and gazed wistfully into her eyes for a moment. They were brown, and the moonlight deepened their sober depths.

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'Do you think you have a claim?' she asked after a moment.

'I'll think almost anything to keep you. But no; I haven't any claim—or none at least that you are not free to jump. But we all have a claim; hang it, the situation has a claim. If you don't stay, you go back on it. That's what I mean.'

'You don't take a serious view of things, Nick,' she said, putting down his arm.

Tarvin didn't see the connection; but he said good-humouredly, 'Oh yes, I do! There's no serious view of life I won't take—in fun—to please you.'

'You see,—you're not in earnest.'

'There's one thing I'm in earnest about,' he whispered in her ear.

'Is there?' She turned away her head.

'I can't live without you.' He leaned toward her, and added in a lower voice: 'Another thing, Kate—I won't.'

Kate compressed her lips. She had her own will. They sat on the bridge beating out their difference until they heard the kitchen clock in a cabin on the other side of the ditch strike eleven. The stream came down out of the mountains that loomed above them; they were half-a-mile from the town. The stillness and the loneliness closed on Tarvin with a physical grip as Kate got up and said decisively that she must go home. He knew she meant that she must go to India, and his own will crumpled helplessly for the moment within hers. He asked himself whether this was the will by which he earned his living, the will which at twenty-eight had made him a successful man by Topaz standards, which was taking him to the State Legislature, and which would

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one day take him much further, unless what ceased to be what. He shook himself scornfully; but he had to add to himself that after all she was only a girl, if he did love her, before he could stride to her side, as she turned her back on him, and say, ‘See here, young woman, you’re away off!’

She did not answer, but walked on.

‘You’re not going to throw your life away on this Indian scheme,’ he pursued. ‘I won’t have it. Your father won’t have it. Your mother will kick and scream at it, and I’ll be there to encourage her. We have some use for your life, if you haven’t. You don’t know the size of your contract. The land isn’t fit for rats; it’s the Bad Lands—yes, that’s just what it is, a great big Bad Lands—morally, physically, and agriculturally, Bad Lands. It’s no place for white men, let alone white women; there’s no climate, no government, no drainage; and there’s cholera, heat, and fighting until you can’t rest. You’ll find it all in the Sunday papers. You want to stay right where you are, young lady!’

She stopped a moment in the road they were following back to Topaz and glanced at his face in the moonlight. He took her hand, and, for all his masterfulness, awaited her word with parted lips.

‘You’re a good man, Nick, but,’ she drooped her eyes, ‘I’m going to sail on the 31st for Calcutta.’

II

Beware the man who's crossed in love,
For pent-up steam must find its vent;
Step back when he is on the move,
And lend him all the Continent.
‘The Buck and the Saw.’

TO sail from New York the 31st she must leave Topaz by the 27th at latest. It was now the 15th. Tarvin made the most of the intervening time. He called on her at her home every evening, and argued it out with her.

Kate listened with the gentlest willingness to be convinced, but with a dread firmness round the corners of her mouth, and with a sad wish to be good to him, if she could, battling in her eyes with a sadder helplessness.

‘I’m called!’ she cried. ‘I’m called. I can’t get away from it. I can’t help listening. I can’t help going.’

And as she told him, grieving, how the cry of her sisters out of that dim misery, that was yet so distinct, tugged at her heart—how the useless horror and torture of their lives called on her by night and by day, Tarvin could not refuse to respect the solemnly felt need that drew her from him. He could not help begging her in every accent he knew not to hearken to it, but the painful pull of the cry she heard was not a strange or incred-

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ible thing to his own generous heart. He only urged hotly that there were other cries, and that there were other people to attend to this one. He, too, had a need, the need for her; and she another, if she would stop a moment to listen to it. They needed each other; that was the supreme need. The women in India could wait; they would go over and look them up later, when the Three C.'s railroad had come to Topaz, and he had made his pile. Meanwhile there was happiness; meanwhile there was love! He was ingenious, he was deeply in love, he knew what he wanted, and he found the most persuasive language for making it seem to be what she wanted in disguise. Kate had to strengthen her resolution often in the intervals between his visits. She could not say much in reply. She had no such gift of communicating herself as Tarvin. Hers was the voiceless nature that can only feel and act.

She had the kind of pluck and the capacity for silent endurance which goes with such natures, or she must often have faltered and turned back from the resolve which had come upon her in the school-garden that spring day, in the two years that followed it. Her parents were the first obstacle. They refused outright to allow her to study medicine. She had wished to be both physician and nurse, believing that in India she would find use for both callings; but since she could follow only one, she was content to enrol herself as a student at a New York training-school for nurses, and this her parents suffered in the bewilderment of finding that they had forgotten how to oppose her gently resolute will through the lifelong habit of yielding to it.

Her ideas had made her mother wish, when she explained them to her, that she had let her grow up wild,

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as she had once seemed certain to do. She was even sorry that the child's father had at last found something to do away from the awful railroad. The railroad now ran two ways from Topaz. Kate had returned from school to find the track stretching a hundred miles to the westward, and her family still there. This time the boom had overtaken them before they could get away. Her father had bought city lots in the acre form and was too rich to move. He had given up his calling and had gone into politics.

Sheriff's love for his daughter was qualified by his general flatness; but it was the clinging affection not uncommon with shallow minds, and he had the habit of indulgence toward her which is the portion of an only child. He was accustomed to say that 'what she did was about right,' he guessed, and he was usually content to let it go at that. He was anxious now that his riches should do her some good, and Kate had not the heart to tell him the ways she had found to make them do her good. To her mother she confided all her plan; to her father she only said that she wished to learn to be a trained nurse. Her mother grieved in secret with the grim, philosophic, almost cheerful hopelessness of women whose lives have taught them always to expect the worst. It was a sore trial to Kate to disappoint her mother; and it cut her to the heart to know that she could not do what both her father and mother expected of her. Indefinite as the expectation was—it was simply that she should come home and live, and be a young lady, like the rest of the world—she felt its justice and reason, and she did not weep the less for them, because for herself she believed, modestly, that it was ordered otherwise.

This was her first trouble. The dissonance between

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those holy moments in the garden and the hard prose which was to give them reality and effect, grew deeper as she went on. It was daunting, and sometimes it was heart-sickening; but she went forward—not always strong, not every moment brave, and only a very little wise, but always forward.

The life at the training-school was a cruel disillusion. She had not expected the path she had set before her to bloom with ease; but at the end of her first month she could have laughed bitterly at the difference between her consecrating dreams and the fact. The dreams looked to her vocation; the fact took no account of it. She had hoped to befriend misery, to bring help and healing to pain from the first days of her apprenticeship. What she was actually set to do was to scald babies' milk-cans.

Her further duties in these early days were no more nearly related to the functions of a nurse, and looking about her among the other girls to see how they kept their ideals alight in the midst of work so little connected with their future calling, she perceived that they got on for the most part by not having any. As she advanced, and was trusted first with babies themselves, and later with the actual work of nursing, she was made to feel how her own purpose isolated her. The others were here for business. With one or two exceptions they had apparently taken up nursing as they might have taken up dressmaking. They were here to learn how to make twenty dollars a week, and the sense of this dispirited her even more than the work she was given to do as a preparation for her high calling. The talk of the Arkansas girl, who sat on a table and swung her legs while she discussed her flirtations with the young doctors

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at the clinics, seemed in itself sometimes a final discouragement. Through all ran the bad food, the scanty sleep, the insufficient hours for recreation, the cruelly long hours assigned for work, the nervous strain of supporting the life from the merely physical point of view.

In addition to the work which she shared with the others, she was taking regular lessons in Hindustani; and she was constantly grateful for the earlier days which had given her robust health and a sound body. Without them she must often have broken down; and soon it began to be a duty not to break down, because it had become possible to help suffering a little. It was this which reconciled her finally to the low and sordid conditions under which the whole affair of her preparation went on.

The repulsive aspects of the nursing itself she did not mind. On the contrary, she found herself liking them as she got into the swing of her work; and when, at the end of her first year, she was placed in charge of a ward at the women's hospital, under another nurse, she began to feel herself drawing in sight of her purpose, and kindled with an interest which made even the surgical operations seem good to her because they helped, and because they allowed her to help a little.

From this time she went on working strongly and efficiently toward her end. Above all, she wanted to be competent—to be wise and thorough. When the time came when those helpless, walled-up women should have no knowledge and no comfort to lean on but hers, she meant that they should lean on the strength of solid intelligence. Her trials were many, but it was her consolation in the midst of them all that her women loved her, and lived upon her comings and goings. Her devotion to her purpose carried her forward. She was presently

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in full charge, and in that long, bare ward where she strengthened so many sufferers for the last parting, where she lived with death and dealt with it, where she went about softly, soothing unspeakable pain, learning the note of human anguish, hearing no sound but the murmur of suffering or relief, she sounded one night the depths of her own nature, and received from an inward monitor the confirmation of her mission. She consecrated herself to it afresh with a joy beyond her first joy of discovery.

And now, every night at half-past eight, Tarvin's hat hung on the hat-rack in the hall-way of her home. He removed it gloomily at a little after eleven, spending the interval in talking over her mission with her persuasively, commandingly, imploringly, indignantly. His indignation was for her plan, but it would sometimes irrepressibly transfer itself to Kate. She was capable not only of defending her plan, but of defending herself and keeping her temper; and as this last was an art beyond Nick, these sessions often came to an end suddenly, and early in the evening. But the next night he would come and sit before her in penitence, and with his elbows on his knees, and his head supported moodily in his hands, would entreat her submissively to have some sense. This never lasted long, and evenings of this kind usually ended in his trying to pound sense into her by hammering his chair-arm with a convinced fist.

No tenderness could leave Tarvin without the need to try to make others believe as he did; but it was a good-humoured need, and Kate did not dislike it. She liked so many things about him, that often as they sat thus, facing each other, she let her fancy wander where it had wandered in her school-girl vacations—in a possible future spent by his side. She brought her fancy back

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again sharply. She had other things to think of now; but there must always be something between her and Tarvin different from her relation to any other man. They had lived in the same house on the prairie at the end of the section, and had risen to take up the same desolate life together morning after morning. The sun brought the morning grayly up over the sad gray plain, and at night left them alone together in the midst of the terrible spaces of silence. They broke the ice together in the muddy river near the section-house, and Tarvin carried her pail back for her. A score of other men lived under the same roof, but it was Tarvin who was kind. The others ran to do what she asked them to do. Tarvin found things to do, and did them while she slept. There was plenty to do. Her mother had a family of twenty-five, twenty of whom were boarders—the men working in one capacity or another directly under Sheriff. The hands engaged in the actual work of building the railroad lived in huge barracks near by, or in temporary cabins or tents. The Sheriffs had a house; that is, they lived in a structure with projecting eaves, windows that could be raised or lowered, and a veranda. But this was the sum of their conveniences, and the mother and daughter did their work alone with the assistance of two Swedes, whose muscles were firm but whose cookery was vague.

Tarvin helped her, and she learned to lean on him; she let him help her, and Tarvin loved her for it. The bond of work shared, of a mutual dependence, of isolation, drew them to each other; and when Kate left the section-house for school there was a tacit understanding between them. The essence of such an understanding, of course, lies in the woman's recognition of it. When she came back from school for the first holiday, Kate's manner

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did not deny her obligation, but did not confirm the understanding, and Tarvin, restless and insistent as he was about other things, did not like to force his claim upon her. It wasn't a claim he could take into court.

This kind of forbearance was well enough while he expected to have her always within reach, while he imagined for her the ordinary future of an unmarried girl. But when she said she was going to India she changed the case. He was not thinking of courtesy or forbearance, or of the propriety of waiting to be formally accepted as he talked to her on the bridge, and afterward in the evenings. He ached with his need for her, and with the desire to keep her.

But it looked as if she were going—going in spite of everything he could say, in spite of his love. He had made her believe in that, if it was any comfort; and it was real enough to her to hurt her, which was a comfort!

Meanwhile she was costing him much, in one way and another, and she liked him well enough to have a conscience about it. But when she would tell him that he must not waste so much time and thought on her, he would ask her not to bother her little head about him: he saw more in her than he did in real estate or politics just then; he knew what he was about.

'I know,' returned Kate. 'But you forget what a delicate position you put me in. I don't want to be responsible for your defeat. Your party will say I planned it.'

Tarvin made a positive and unguarded remark about his party, to which Kate replied that if he didn't care she must; she couldn't have it said, after the election, that he had neglected his canvass for her, and that her father had won his seat in consequence.

'Of course,' she added frankly, 'I want father to go to

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the State legislature, and I don't want you to go, because if you win the election, he can't; but I don't want to help prevent you from getting in.'

'Don't worry about your father getting that seat, young lady!' cried Tarvin. 'If that's all you've got to lie awake about, you can sleep from now until the Three C.'s comes to Topaz. I'm going to Denver myself this fall, and you'd better make your plans to come along. Come! How would it suit you to be the Speaker's wife, and live on Capitol Hill?'

Kate liked him well enough to go half credulously with him in his customary assumption that the difference between his having anything he wanted and his not having it, was the difference between his wanting it and his not wanting it.

'Nick!' she exclaimed, deriding but doubtful, 'you won't be Speaker!'

'I'd undertake to be Governor, if I thought the idea would fetch you. Give me a word of hope, and you'll see what I'd do!'

'No, no!' she said, shaking her head. 'My governors are all Rajahs, and they live a long way from here.'

'But say, India's half the size of the United States. Which State are you going to?'

'Which—?'

'Ward, township, county, section? What's your post-office address?'

'Rhatore, in the province of Gokral Seetarun, Rajputana, India.'

'All that!' he repeated despairingly. There was a horrible definiteness about it; it almost made him believe she was going. He saw her drifting hopelessly out of his life into a land on the nether rim of the world,

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named out of the ‘Arabian Nights’ and probably populated out of them. ‘Nonsense, Kate! You’re not going to try to live in any such heathen fairyland. What’s it got to do with Topaz, Kate? What’s it got to do with home? You can’t do it, I tell you. Let them nurse themselves. Leave it to them! Or leave it to me! I’ll go over myself, turn some of their pagan jewels into money and organise a nursing corps on a plan that you shall dictate. Then we’ll be married, and I’ll take you out to look at my work. I’ll make a go of it. Don’t say they’re poor. That necklace alone would fetch money enough to organise an army of nurses! If your missionary told the truth in his sermon at church the other night it would pay the national debt. Diamonds the size of hens’ eggs, yokes of pearls, coils of sapphires the girth of a man’s wrist, and emeralds until you can’t rest—and they hang all that around the neck of an idol, or keep it stored in a temple, and call on decent white girls to come out and help nurse them! It’s what I call cheek.’

‘As if money could help them! It’s not that. There’s no charity or kindness or pity in money, Nick; the only real help is to give yourself.’

‘All right. Then give me too! I’ll go along,’ he said, returning to the safer humorous view.

She laughed, but stopped herself suddenly. ‘You mustn’t come to India, Nick. You won’t do that? You won’t follow me! You shan’t.’

‘Well, if I get a place as Rajah, I don’t say I wouldn’t. There might be a dollar in it.’

‘Nick! They wouldn’t let an American be a Rajah.’

It is strange that men to whom life is a joke find comfort in women to whom it is a prayer.

‘They might let him run a Rajah, though,’ said Tar-

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vin, undisturbed; ‘and it might be the softer snap. Ra-jahing itself is classed extra hazardous, I think.’

‘How?’

‘By the accident insurance companies—double premium. None of my companies would touch the risk. They might take a vizier, though,’ he added meditatively. ‘They come from that “Arabian Nights” section, don’t they?’

‘Well, you are not to come,’ she said definitively. ‘You must keep away. Remember that.’

Tarvin got up suddenly. ‘Oh, good-night! Good-night!’ he cried.

He shook himself together impatiently, and waved her from him with a parting gesture of rejection and cancellation. She followed him into the passage, where he was gloomily taking his hat from its wonted peg; but he would not even let her help him on with his coat.

No man can successfully conduct a love-affair and a political canvass at the same time. It was perhaps the perception of this fact that had led Sheriff to bend an approving eye on the attentions which his opponent in the coming election had lately been paying his daughter. Tarvin had always been interested in Kate, but not so consecutively and intensely. Sheriff was stumping the district and was seldom at home, but in his irregular appearances at Topaz he smiled stolidly on his rival’s occupation. In looking forward to an easy victory over him in the joint debate at Canon City, however, he had perhaps relied too much on the younger man’s absorption. Tarvin’s consciousness that he had not been playing his party fair had lately chafed against his pride of success. The result was irritation, and Kate’s prophecies and insinuations were pepper on an open wound.

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The Canon City meeting was set down for the night following the conversation just recorded, and Tarvin set foot on the shaky dry-goods-box platform at the roller skating rink that night, with a raging young intention to make it understood that he was still here—if he was in love.

Sheriff had the opening, and Tarvin sat in the background dangling a long, restless leg from one knee. The patchily illumined huddle of auditors below him looked up at a nervous, bony, loose-hung man, with a kind, clever, aggressive eye, and a masterful chin. His nose was prominent, and he had the furrowed forehead and the hair thinned about the temples which come to young men in the West. The alert, acute glance which went roving about the hall, measuring the audience to which he was to speak, had the look of sufficiency to the next need, whatever it might be, which, perhaps, more than anything else, commends men to other men beyond the Mississippi. He was dressed in the short sack-coat, which is good enough for most Western public functions; but he had left at Topaz the flannel of everyday wear, and was clad in the white linen of civilisation.

He was wondering as he listened to Sheriff, how a father could have the heart to get off false views on silver and the tariff to this crowd, while his daughter was hatching that ghastly business at home. The true views were so much mixed up in his own mind with Kate, that when he himself rose at last to answer Sheriff, he found it hard not to ask how the deuce a man expected an intelligent mass meeting to accept the political economy he was trying to apply to the government of a State, when he couldn't so much as run his own family? Why in the world didn't he stop his daughter from making such a

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hash of her life?—that was what he wanted to know. What were fathers for? He reserved these apt remarks, and launched instead upon a flood of figures, facts, and arguments.

Tarvin had precisely the gift by which the stump orator coils himself into the heart of the stump auditor: he upbraided, he arraigned, he pleaded, insisted, denounced; he raised his lean, long arms, and called the gods and the statistics and the Republican party to witness, and, when he could make a point that way, he did not scorn to tell a story. ‘Why,’ he would cry defiantly, in that colloquial shout which the political orator uses for his anecdotes, ‘that is like a man I used to know back in Wisconsin, who—’ It wasn’t very much like the man in Wisconsin; and Tarvin had never been in Wisconsin, and didn’t know the man; but it was a good story, and when the crowd howled with delight Sheriff gathered himself together a little and tried to smile, and that was what Tarvin wanted.

There were dissentient voices, and the jointness of the debate was sometimes not confined to the platform; but the deep, relishing groans which would often follow applause or laughter, acted as a spur to Tarvin, who had joined the janitor of the rink that afternoon in mixing the dusky brew on the table before him, and who really did not need a spur. Under the inspiration of the mixture in the pitcher, the passionate resolve in his heart, and the groans and hisses, he melted gradually into an ecstasy of conviction which surprised even himself, and he began to feel at last that he had his audience under his hand. Then he gripped them, raised them aloft like a conjuror, patted and stroked them, dropped them to dreadful depths, snatched them back, to show that he

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could, caught them to his heart, and told them a story. And with that audience hugged to his breast he marched victoriously up and down upon the prostrate body of the Democratic party, chanting its requiem. It was a great time. Everybody rose at the end and said so loudly; they stood on benches and shouted it with a bellow that shook the building. They tossed their caps in the air, and danced on one another, and wanted to carry Tarvin around the hall on their shoulders.

But Tarvin, with a choking at the throat, turned his back on it all, and, fighting his way blindly through the crowd which had gathered on the platform, reached the dressing-room behind the stage. He shut and bolted the door behind him, and flung himself into a chair, mopping his forehead.

‘And the man who can do that,’ he muttered, ‘can’t make one tiny little bit of a girl marry him.’

III

Who are the Rulers of Ind?—to whom shall we bow the knee?

Make thy peace with the women, and men shall make thee L. G.

‘Maxims of Hafiz.’

IT was an opinion not concealed in Canon City the next morning, that Tarvin had wiped up the floor with his adversary; and it was at least definitely on record, as a result of Tarvin’s speech, that when Sheriff rose half-heartedly to make the rejoinder set down for him on the programme, he had been howled back into his seat by a united public opinion. But Sheriff met Tarvin at the railway station where they were both to take the train for Topaz with a fair imitation of a nod and smile, and certainly showed no inclination to avoid him on the journey up. If Tarvin had really done Kate’s father the office attributed to him by the voice of Canon City, Sheriff did not seem to be greatly disturbed by the fact. But Tarvin reflected that Sheriff had balancing grounds of consolation—a reflection which led him to make the further one that he had made a fool of himself. He had indeed had the satisfaction of explaining publicly to the rival candidate which was the better man, and had enjoyed the pleasure of proving to his constituents that he was still a force to be reckoned with, in

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spite of the mad missionary notion which had built a nest in a certain young woman's head. But how did that bring him nearer Kate? Had it not rather, so far as her father could influence the matter, put him farther away—as far as it had brought his own election near. He believed he would be elected now. But to what? Even the Speakership he had dangled before her did not seem so remote in the light of last night's occurrences. But the only speakership that Tarvin cared to be elected to was the speakership of Kate's heart.

He feared he shouldn't be chosen to fill that high office immediately, and as he glanced at the stumpy, sturdy form standing next him on the edge of the track, he knew whom he had to thank. She would never go to India if she had a man for a father like some men he knew. But a smooth, politic, conciliating, selfish, easy-going rich man—what could you expect? Tarvin could have forgiven Sheriff's smoothness if it had been backed by force. But he had his opinion of a man who had become rich by accident in a town like Topaz.

Sheriff presented the spectacle, intolerable to Tarvin, of a man who had become bewilderingly well-to-do through no fault of his own, and who now wandered vaguely about in his good fortune, seeking anxiously to avoid giving offence. In his politics he carried this far; and he was a treasury of delight just at this time to the committees of railroad engineers' balls, Knight Templars, excursions, and twilight coteries, and to the organisers of church bazaars, theatricals, and oyster suppers, who had tickets to sell. He went indiscriminately to the oyster suppers and bazaars of all denominations in Topaz, and made Kate and her mother go with him; and his collection of Baptist dolls, Presbyterian embroidery, and

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Roman Catholic sofa-pillows and spatter-work, filled his parlour at home.

But his universal good-nature was not so popular as it deserved to be. The twilight coteries took his money but kept their opinion of him; and Tarvin, as the opposing candidate, had shown what he thought of his rival's system of politics by openly declining to buy a single ticket. This feeble-foolish wish to please everybody was, he understood very well, at the root of Sheriff's attitude toward his daughter's mania. Kitty wanted to go so bad, he supposed he'd better let her, was his slouching version of the situation at home. He declared that he had opposed the idea strongly when she had first suggested it, and Tarvin did not doubt that Sheriff, who he knew was fond of her, had really done what he could. His complaint against him was not on the score of disposition but of capacity. He recognised, however, that this was finally a complaint, like all his others, against Kate; for it was Kate's will which made all pleadings vain.

When the train for Topaz arrived at the station, Sheriff and Tarvin got into the drawing-room car together. Tarvin did not yearn to talk to Sheriff on the way to Topaz, but neither did he wish to seem to shirk conversation. Sheriff offered him a cigar in the smoking-room of the Pullman, and when Dave Lewis, the conductor, came through, Tarvin hailed him as an old friend, and made him come back and join them when he had gone his rounds. Tarvin liked Lewis in the way that he liked the thousand other casual acquaintances in the State with whom he was popular; and his invitation was not altogether a device for avoiding private talk with Sheriff. The conductor told them that he had the President of the Three C.'s on behind in a special car, with his party.

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'No?' exclaimed Tarvin, and begged him to introduce him on the spot; he was precisely the man he wanted to see. The conductor laughed, and said he wasn't a director of the road—not himself; but when he had left them to go about his duties, he came back, after a time, to say that the president had been asking whom he could recommend at Topaz as a fair-minded and public-spirited man, able to discuss in a reasonable spirit the question of the Three C.'s coming to Topaz. The conductor told him that he had two such gentlemen on board his train at that moment; and the president sent word to them by him that he would be glad to have a little talk with them if they would come back to his car.

For a year the directorate of the Three C.'s had been talking of running their line through Topaz, in the dispassionate and impartial manner of directorates which await encouragement. The Board of Trade at Topaz had promptly met and voted the encouragement. It took the shape of town bonds and gifts of land, and finally of an undertaking to purchase shares of stock in the road itself, at an inflated price. This was handsome even for a board of trade; but, under the prick of town ambition and town pride, Rustler had done better. Rustler lay fifteen miles from Topaz, up in the mountains, and by that much nearer the mines; and Topaz recognised it as its rival in other matters than that of the Three C.'s.

The two towns had enjoyed their boom at about the same time; then the boom had left Rustler and had betaken itself to Topaz. This had cost Rustler a number of citizens, who moved to the more prosperous place. Some of the citizens took their houses up bodily, loaded them on a flat car and sent them over to Topaz as freight, to the desolation of the remaining inhabitants of Rustler.

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But Topaz now began in her turn to feel that she was losing her clutch. A house or two had been moved back. It was Rustler this time which was gaining. If the railroad went there, Topaz was lost. If Topaz secured the railroad, the town was made. The two towns hated each other as such towns hate in the West—malignantly, viciously, joyously. If a convulsion of nature had obliterated one town, the other must have died from sheer lack of interest in life. If Topaz could have killed Rustler, or if Rustler could have killed Topaz, by more enterprise, push, and go, or by the lightnings of the local press, the surviving town would have organised a triumphal procession and a dance of victory. But the destruction of the other town by any other than the heaven-appointed means of schemes, rustle, and a board of trade, would have been a poignant grief to the survivor.

The most precious possession of a citizen of the West is his town pride. It is the flower of that pride to hate the rival town. Town pride cannot exist without town jealousy, and it was therefore fortunate that Topaz and Rustler lay within convenient hating distance of each other, for this living belief of men in the one spot of all the great Western wilderness on which they have chosen to pitch their tents, contains within itself the future and the promise of the West.

Tarvin cherished this sentiment as a religion. It was nearer to him than anything in the world but Kate, and sometimes it was even nearer than Kate. It did duty with him for all the higher aspirations and ideals which beckon other men. He wished to succeed, he wished to make a figure, but his best wish for himself was one with his best wish for the town. He could not succeed if the town failed; and if the town prospered he must prosper.

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His ambition for Topaz, his glory in Topaz, were a patriotism—passionate and personal. Topaz was his country; and because it was near and real, because he could put his hand on it, and, above all, because he could buy and sell pieces of it, it was much more recognisably his country than the United States of America, which was his country in time of war.

He had been present at the birth of Topaz. He had known it when his arms could almost encircle it; he had watched and fondled and caressed it; he had pegged down his heart with the first peg of the survey; and now he knew what was good for it. It wanted the Three C.'s.

The conductor presented Tarvin and Sheriff to the president when he had led them back to his private car, and the president made them both known to his young wife—a blonde of twenty-five, consciously pretty and conspicuously bridal—by whose side Tarvin placed himself with his instant perception. There were apartments in the private car before and beyond the drawing-room into which they had been shown. The whole was a miracle of compactness and convenience; the decoration was of a specious refinement. In the drawing-room was a smother of pluses, in hues of no kindred, a flicker of tortured nickel-work, and a flash of mirrors. The studied soberness of the woodwork, in a more modern taste, heightened the high pitch of the rest.

The president of the embryo Colorado and California Central made room for Sheriff in one of the movable wicker chairs by tilting out a heap of illustrated papers, and bent two beady black eyes on him from under a pair of bushy eyebrows. His own bulk filled and overflowed another of the frail chairs. He had the mottled cheeks and the flaccid fulness of chin of a man of fifty who has

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lived too well. He listened to the animated representations which Sheriff at once began making him with an irresponsive, sullen face, while Tarvin engaged Mrs. Mutrie in a conversation which did not imply the existence of railroads. He knew all about the marriage of the president of the Three C.'s, and he found her very willing to let him use his knowledge flatteringly. He made her his compliments; he beguiled her into telling him about her wedding journey. They were just at the end of it; they were to settle in Denver. She wondered how she should like it. Tarvin told her how she would like it. He guaranteed Denver; he gilded and graced it for her; he made it the city of a dream, and peopled it out of an Eastern fairy tale. Then he praised the stores and the theatres. He said they beat New York, but she ought to see their theatre at Topaz. He hoped they meant to stay over a day or two at Topaz.

Tarvin would not praise Topaz crudely, as he praised Denver. He contrived to intimate its unique charm, and when he had managed to make her see it in fancy as the prettiest, and finest, and most prosperous town in the West, he left the subject. But most of their subjects were more personal, and while he discussed them with her he pushed out experimentally in one direction and another, first for a chord of sympathy, then for her weak point. He wanted to know how she could be reached. That was the way to reach the president. He had perceived it as soon as he entered the car. He knew her history, and had even known her father, who had once kept the hotel where he stayed when he went to Omaha. He asked her about the old house, and the changes of proprietorship since he had been there. Who had it now? He hoped they had kept the head waiter. And

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the cook? It made his mouth water to think of that cook. She laughed with instant sociability. Her childhood had been passed about the hotel. She had played in the halls and corridors, drummed on the parlour piano, and consumed candy in the office. She knew that cook —knew him personally. He had given her custard to take to bed with her. Oh yes! He was still there.

There was an infectious quality in Tarvin's open and friendly manner, in his willingness to be amused, and in his lively willingness to contribute to the current stock of amusement, and there was something endearing in his hearty, manly way, his confident, joyous air, his manner of taking life strongly, and richly, and happily. He had an impartial kindness for the human species. He was own cousin to the race, and own brother to the members of it he knew, when they would let him be.

He and Mrs. Mutrie were shortly on beautiful terms, and she made him come back with her to the bow-window at the end of the car, and point out the show sights of the Grand Canon of the Arkansas to her. Theirs was the rearmost carriage, and they looked back through the polished sweep of glass, in which the president's car terminated, at the twisting streak of the receding track, and the awful walls of towering rock between which it found its way. They stooped to the floor to catch sight of the massy heights that hung above them, and peered back at the soaring chaos of rock which, having opened to let them through, closed again immitigably as they left it behind. The train went racketing profanely through the tumbled beauty of this primeval world, miraculously keeping a foothold on the knife-edge of space, won for it at the bottom of the canon from the river on one side, and from the rock on the other. Mrs.

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Mutrie would sometimes lose her balance as the train swept them around the ceaseless curves, and only saved herself by snatching at Tarvin. It ended in his making her take his arm, and then they stood and rocked together with the motion of the train, Tarvin steadyng their position with outstretched legs, while they gazed up at the monster spires and sovereign hills of stone wavering and dizzying over their heads.

Mrs. Mutrie gave frequent utterance to little exclamations of wonder and applause, which began by being the appropriate feminine response to great expressions of Nature, and ended in an awed murmur. Her light nature was controlled and subdued by the spectacle as it might have been silenced by the presence of death; she used her little arts and coquettres on Tarvin mechanically and half-heartedly, until they were finally out of the canon, when she gave a gasp of relief, and taking petulant possession of him, made him return with her to the chairs they had left in the drawing-room. Sheriff was still pouring the story of the advantages of Topaz into the unattending ear of the president, whose eyes were on the window-pane. Mutrie received her pat on the back and her whispered confidence with the air of an embarrassed ogre. She flounced into her former seat, and commanded Tarvin to amuse her; and Tarvin willingly told her of a prospecting expedition he had once made into the country above the canon. He hadn't found what he was looking for, which was silver, but he had found some rather uncommon amethysts.

'Oh, you don't mean it! You delightful man! Amethysts! Real live ones? I didn't know they found amethysts in Colorado.'

A singular light kindled in her eyes, a light of passion

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and longing. Tarvin fastened on the look instantly. Was that her weak point? If it was—He was full of learning about precious stones. Were they not part of the natural resources of the country about Topaz? He could talk precious stones with her until the cows came home. But would that bring the Three C.'s to Topaz? A wild notion of working complimentary bridal resolutions and an appropriation for a diamond tiara through the Board of Trade danced through his head, and was dismissed. No public offerings of that kind would help Topaz. This was a case for private diplomacy, for subtle and laborious delicacies, for quiet and friendly manipulation, for the tact of finger-tips—a touch here, a touch there, and then a grip—a case, in fine, for Nicholas Tarvin, and for no one else on top of earth. He saw himself bringing the Three C.'s royally, unexpectedly into Topaz, and fixing it there by that same Tarvin's unaided strength; he saw himself the founder of the future of the town he loved. He saw Rustler in the dust, and the owner of a certain twenty-acre plot a millionaire.

His fancy dwelt affectionately for a moment on the twenty-acre plot; the money with which he had bought it had not come easily, and business in the last analysis was always business. But the plot, and his plan of selling a portion of it to the Three C.'s for a round-house, when the railroad came, and disposing of the rest as town lots by the front foot, were minor chords in the larger harmony. His dream was of Topaz. If promoters, in accord with the high plan of providence, usually came in on the ground floor when their plans went right, that was a fact strictly by the way.

He noticed now, as he glanced at Mrs. Mutrie's hands, that she wore unusual rings. They were not numerous,

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but the stones were superb. He ventured to admire the huge solitaire she wore on her left hand, and, as they fell into a talk about jewels, she drew it off to let him see it. She said the diamond had a history. Her father had bought it from an actor, a tragedian who had met bad business at Omaha, after playing to empty houses at Denver, Topeka, Kansas City, and St. Jo. The money had paid the fares of the company home to New York, a fact which connected the stone with the only real good it had ever done its various owners. The tragedian had won it from a gambler who had killed his man in a quarrel over it; the man who had died for it had bought it at a low price from the absconding clerk of a diamond merchant.

'It ought to have been smuggled out of the mines by the man who found it at Kimberley, or somewhere, and sold to an I. D. B.,' she said, 'to make the story complete. Don't you think so, Mr. Tarvin?'

She asked all her questions with an arch of the eyebrow, and an engaging smile which required the affirmative readily furnished by Tarvin. He would have assented to an hypothesis denying virtue to the discoveries of Galileo and Newton if Mrs. Mutrie had broached it just then. He sat tense and rigid, full of his notion, watching, waiting, like a dog on the scent.

'I look into it sometimes to see if I can't find a picture of the crimes it has seen,' she said. 'They're so nice and shivery, don't you think so, Mr. Tarvin, particularly the murder? But what I like best about it is the stone itself. It is a beauty, isn't it? Pa used to say it was the handsomest he'd ever seen, and in a hotel you see lots of good diamonds, you know.' She gazed a moment affectionately into the liquid depths of the brilliant. 'Oh, there's

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nothing like a beautiful stone—nothing!' she breathed. Her eyes kindled. He heard for the first time in her voice the ring of absolute sincerity and unconsciousness. 'I could look at a perfect jewel for ever, and I don't much care what it is, so it is perfect. Pa used to know how I loved stones, and he was always trading them with the people who came to the house. Drummers are great fellows for jewellery, you know, but they don't always know a good stone from a bad one. Pa used to make some good trades,' she said, pursing her pretty lips meditatively; 'but he would never take anything but the best, and then he would trade that, if he could, for something better. He would always give two or three stones with the least flaw in them for one real good one. He knew they were the only ones I cared for. Oh, I do love them! They're better than folks. They're always there and always just so beautiful!'

'I think I know a necklace you'd like, if you care for such things,' said Tarvin quietly.

'Do you?' she beamed. 'Oh, where?'

'A long way from here.'

'Oh—Tiffany's!' she exclaimed scornfully. 'I know you!' she added, with resumed art of intonation.

'No. Further.'

'Where?'

'India.'

She stared at him a moment interestedly. 'Tell me what it's like,' she said. Her whole attitude and accent were changed again. There was plainly one subject on which she could be serious. 'Is it really good?'

'It's the best,' said Tarvin, and stopped.

'Well!' she exclaimed. 'Don't tantalise me. What is it made of?'

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'Oh, diamonds, pearls, rubies, opals, turquoises, amethysts, sapphires—a rope of them. The rubies are as big as your fist; the diamonds are the size of hens' eggs. It's worth a king's ransom.'

She caught her breath. Then after a long moment, 'Oh!' she sighed; and then, 'Oh!' she murmured again, languorously, wonderingly, longingly. 'And where is it?' she asked briskly, of a sudden.

'Round the neck of an idol in the province of Rajputana. Do you want it?' he asked grimly.

She laughed. 'Yes,' she answered.

'I'll get it for you,' said Tarvin simply.

'Yes, you will!' she pouted.

'I will,' repeated Tarvin.

She threw back her gay blonde head, and laughed to the painted Cupids on the ceiling of the car. She always threw back her head when she laughed; it showed her throat.

IV

Your patience, Sirs, the Devil took me up
To the burned mountain over Sicily,
(Fit place for me), and thence I saw my Earth—
Not all Earth's splendour, 'twas beyond my need—
And that one spot I love—all Earth to me,
And her I love, my Heaven. What said I? . . .
My love was safe from all the powers of Hell—
For you—e'en you—acquit her of my guilt.
But Sula, nestling by our sail-specked sea,
My city, child of mine, my heart, my home.
Mine and my pride—evil might visit there!
It was for Sula and her naked ports,
Prey to the galleys of the Algerine;
Our city Sula, that I drove my price—
For love of Sula and for love of her.
The twain were woven, gold on sackcloth, twined
Past any sundering—till God shall judge
The evil and the good.

‘The Grand-Master’s Defence.’

THE president engaged rooms at the hotel beside the railroad track at Topaz, and stayed over the next day. Tarvin and Sheriff took possession of him, and showed him the town, and what they called its ‘natural resources.’ Tarvin caused the president to hold rein when he had ridden with him to a point out-

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side the town and discoursed, in the midst of the open plain, and in the face of the snow-capped mountains, on the reasonableness and necessity of making Topaz the end of a division for the new railroad, and putting the division superintendent, the workshops, and the round-house here.

In his heart he knew the president to be absolutely opposed to bringing the railroad to Topaz at all; but he preferred to assume the minor point. It was much easier, as a matter of fact, to show that Topaz ought to be made a junction, and the end of a division, than it was to show that it ought to be a station on the Three C.'s. If it was anything it would have to be a junction. The difficulty was to prove that it ought to be anything. Tarvin knew the whole Topaz situation forward and back, as he might have known the multiplication table. He was not president of the Board of Trade and the head of a land and improvement company, organised with a capital of a million on a cash basis of \$2000, for nothing. Tarvin's company included all the solid men of the town; it owned the open plain from Topaz to the foothills, and had laid it out in streets, avenues, and public parks. One could see the whole thing on a map hung in the company's office on Connecticut Avenue, which was furnished in oak, floored with mosaic, carpeted with Turkish rugs, and draped with silk. There one could buy town lots at any point within two miles of the town; there, in fact, Tarvin had some town lots to sell. The habit of having them to sell had taught him the worst and the best that could be said about the place; and he knew to an exactitude all that he could make a given man believe about it.

He was aware, for example, that Rustler not only had

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richer mines in its near neighbourhood than Topaz, but that it tapped a mining country behind it of unexplored and fabulous wealth; and he knew that the president knew it. He was equally familiar with other facts—as, for example, that the mines about Topaz were fairly good, though nothing remarkable in a region of great mineral wealth; and that, although the town lay in a wide and well-irrigated valley, and in the midst of an excellent cattle country, these were limited advantages, and easily matched elsewhere. In other words, the natural resources of Topaz constituted no such claim for it as a ‘great railroad centre’ as he would have liked any one to suppose who heard him talk.

But he was not talking to himself. His private word to himself was that Topaz was created to be a railroad town, and the way to create it was to make it a railroad town. This proposition, which could not have been squared to any system of logic, proceeded on the soundest system of reasoning. As thus: Topaz was not an existence at all; Topaz was a hope. Very well! And when one wished to make such hopes realities in the West, what did one do? Why, get some one else to believe in them, of course. Topaz was valueless without the Three C.’s. Then what was its value to the Three C.’s? Obviously the value that the Three C.’s would give it.

Tarvin’s pledge to the president amounted to this: that if he would give them the chance, they would be worthy of it; and he contended that, in essence, that was all that any town could say. The point for the president to judge was which place would be most likely to be worthy of such an opportunity—Topaz or Rustler—and he claimed there could be no question about that. When you came to size it up, he said, it was the character of

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the inhabitants that counted. They were dead at Rustler—dead and buried. Everybody knew that: there was no trade, no industry, no life, no energy, no money there. And look at Topaz! The president could see the character of her citizens at a glance as he walked the streets. They were wide awake down here. They meant business. They believed in their town, and they were ready to put their money on her. The president had only to say what he expected of them. And then he broached to him his plan for getting one of the Denver smelters to establish a huge branch at Topaz; he said that he had an agreement with one of them in his pocket, conditioned solely on the Three C.'s coming their way. The company couldn't make any such arrangement with Rustler; he knew that. Rustler hadn't the flux, for one thing. The smelter people had come up from Denver at the expense of Topaz, and had proved Topaz's allegation that Rustler couldn't find a proper flux for smelting its ore nearer to her own borders than fifteen miles—in other words, she couldn't find it this side of Topaz.

Tarvin went on to say that what Topaz wanted was an outlet for her products to the Gulf of Mexico, and the Three C.'s was the road to furnish it. The president had, perhaps, listened to such statements before, for the entire and crystalline impudence of this drew no retort from his stolidity. He seemed to consider it as he considered the other representations made to him, without hearing it. A railroad president, weighing the advantages of rival towns, could not find it within his conception of dignity to ask which of the natural products of Topaz sought relief through the Gulf. But if Mutrie could have asked such a question, Tarvin would have answered unblushingly, 'Rustler's.' He implied this

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freely in the suggestion which he made immediately in the form of a concession. Of course, he said, if the road wanted to tap the mineral wealth of the country behind Rustler it would be a simple matter to run a branch road up there, and bring down the ore to be smelted at Topaz. Rustler had a value to the road as a mining centre; he didn't pretend to dispute that. But a mineral road would bring down all the ore as well as a main line, make the same traffic for the road, and satisfy all proper claims of Rustler to consideration, while leaving the junction where it belonged by virtue of natural position.

He boldly asked the president how he expected to get up steam and speed for the climb over the Pass, if he made Rustler the end of the division, and changed engines there. The place was already in the mountains; as a practical railroad-man the president must know that his engines could get no start from Rustler. The heavy grade by which the railroad would have to get out of the place, beginning in the town itself, prohibited the idea of making it the end of a division. If his engines, by good luck, weren't stalled on the grade, what did he think of the annual expense involved in driving heavy trains daily at a high mountain from the vantage-ground of a steep slope? What the Three C.'s wanted for the end of their division and their last stop before the climb over the Pass was a place like Topaz, designed for them by nature, built in the centre of a plain, which the railroad could traverse at a level for five miles before attacking the hills.

This point Tarvin made with the fervour and relief born of dealing with one solid and irrefragable fact. It was really his best argument, and he saw that it had reached the president as the latter took up his reins silently, and led the way back to town. But another

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glance at Mutrie's face told him that he had failed hopelessly in his main contention. The certainty of this would have been heart-breaking if he had not expected to fail. Success lay elsewhere; but before trying that he had determined to use every other means.

Tarvin's eye rested lovingly on his town as they turned their horses again toward the cluster of dwellings scattered irregularly in the midst of the wide valley. She might be sure that he would see her through.

Of course the Topaz of his affections melted in and out of the Topaz of fact, by shadings and subtleties which no measurement could record. The relation of the real Topaz to Tarvin's Topaz, or to the Topaz of any good citizen of the place, was a matter which no friendly observer could wish to press. In Tarvin's own case it was impossible to say where actual belief stopped and willingness to believe went on. What he knew was that he did believe; and with him the best possible reason for faith in Topaz would have been that it needed to be believed in hard. The need would have been only another reason for liking it.

To the ordered Eastern eye the city would have seemed a raw, untidy, lonely collection of ragged wooden buildings sprawling over a level plain. But this was only another proof that one can see only what one brings to the seeing. It was not so that Tarvin saw it; and he would not have thanked the Easterner who should have taken refuge in praise of his snow-whitened hills, walling the valley in a monstrous circle. The Easterner might keep his idea that Topaz merely blotted a beautiful picture; to Tarvin the picture was Topaz's scenery, and the scenery only an incident of Topaz. It was one of her natural advantages—her own, like her climate, her altitude, and her Board of Trade.

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He named the big mountains to the president as they rode; he showed him where their big irrigating ditch led the water down out of the heights, and where it was brought along under the shadow of the foothills before it started across the plain toward Topaz; he told him the number of patients in their hospital, decently subduing his sense of their numerousness, as a testimony to the prosperity of the town; and as they rode into the streets he pointed out the opera-house, the post-office, the public-school, and the court-house, with the modesty a mother summons who shows her first-born.

It was at least as much to avoid thinking as to exploit the merits of Topaz that he spared the president nothing. Through all his advocacy another voice had made itself heard, and now, in the sense of momentary failure, the bitterness of another failure caught him with a fresh twinge; for since his return he had seen Kate, and knew that nothing short of a miracle would prevent her from starting for India within three days. In contempt of the man who was making this possible, and in anger and desperation, he had spoken at last directly to Sheriff, appealing to him by all he held most dear to stop this wickedness. But there are limp rags which no buckram can stiffen; and Sheriff, willing as he was to oblige, could not take strength into his fibre from the outside, though Tarvin offered him all of his. His talk with Kate, supplemented by this barren interview with her father, had given him a sickening sense of powerlessness from which nothing but a large success in another direction could rescue him. He thirsted for success, and it had done him good to attack the president, even with the fore-knowledge that he must fail with him.

He could forget Kate's existence while he fought for

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Topaz, but he remembered it with a pang as he parted from Mutrie. He had her promise to make one of the party he was taking to the Hot Springs that afternoon; if it had not been for that he could almost have found it in his heart to let Topaz take care of herself for the remainder of the president's stay. As it was, he looked forward to the visit to the Springs as a last opening to hope. He meant to make a final appeal; he meant to have it out with Kate, for he could not believe in defeat, and he could not think that she would go.

The excursion to the Hot Springs was designed to show the president and Mrs. Mutrie what a future Topaz must have as a winter resort, if all other advantages failed her; and they had agreed to go with the party which Tarvin had hastily got together. With a view to a little quiet talk with Kate, he had invited three men besides Sheriff —Maxim, the postmaster; Heckler, the editor of the '*Topaz Telegram*' (both his colleagues on the Board of Trade); and a pleasant young Englishman, named Carmathan. He expected them to do some of the talking to the president, and to give him half an hour with Kate without detriment to Mutrie's impressions of Topaz. It had occurred to him that the president might be ready by this time for a fresh view of the town, and Heckler was the man to give it to him.

Carmathan had come to Topaz two years before in his capacity of colonising younger son, to engage in the cattle business, equipped with a riding-crop, top-boots, and \$2000 in money. He had lost the money; but he knew now that riding-crops were not used in punching cattle, and he was at the moment using this knowledge, together with other information gathered on the same subject, in the calling of cowboy on a neighbouring range. He was

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getting \$30 a month, and was accepting his luck with the philosophy which comes to the adoptive as well as to the native-born citizens of the West. Kate liked him for the pride and pluck which did not allow him the easy remedy of writing home, and for other things; and for the first half of their ride to the Hot Springs they rode side by side, while Tarvin made Mr. and Mrs. Mutrie look up at the rocky heights between which they began to pass. He showed them the mines burrowing into the face of the rock far aloft, and explained the geological formation with the purely practical learning of a man who buys and sells mines. The road which ran alongside the track of the railroad already going through Topaz, wandered back and forth over it from time to time, as Tarvin said, at the exact angle which the Three C.'s would be choosing later. Once a train laboured past them, tugging up the heavy grade that led to the town. The narrowing gorge was the first closing in of the hills, which, after widening again, gathered in the great cliffs of the canon twenty miles below, to face each other across the chasm. The sweep of pictured rock above their heads lifted itself into strange, gnarled crags, or dipped suddenly and swam on high in straining peaks; but for the most part it was sheer wall—blue and brown and purplish-red umber, ochre, and the soft hues between.

Tarvin dropped back, and ranged his horse beside Kate's. Carmathan, with whom he was in friendly relation, gave place to him instantly, and rode forward to join the others in advance.

She lifted her speaking eyes as he drew rein beside her, and begged him silently to save them both the continuance of a hopeless contest; but Tarvin's jaw was set, and he would not have listened to an angel's voice.

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'I tire you by talking of this thing, Kate. I know it. But I've got to talk of it. I've got to save you.'

'Don't try any more, Nick,' she answered gently. 'Please don't. It's my salvation to go. It is the one thing I want to do. It seems to me sometimes, when I think of it, that it was perhaps the thing I was sent into the world to do. We are all sent into the world to do something, don't you think so, Nick, even if it's ever so tiny and humble and no account? I've got to do it, Nick. Make it easy for me.'

'I'll be—hammered if I will! I'll make it hard. That's what I'm here for. Every one else yields to that vicious little will of yours. Your father and mother let you do what you like. They don't begin to know what you are running your precious head into. I can't replace it. Can you? That makes me positive. It also makes me ugly.'

Kate laughed.

'It does make you ugly, Nick. But I don't mind. I think I like it that you should care. If I could stay at home for any one, I'd do it for you. Believe that, won't you?'

'Oh, I'll believe, and thank you into the bargain. But what good will it do me? I don't want belief. I want you.'

'I know, Nick. I know. But India wants me more—or not me, but what I can do, and what women like me can do. There's a cry from Macedonia, "Come over and help us!" While I hear that cry I can find no pleasure in any other good. I could be your wife, Nick. That's easy. But with that in my ears I should be in torture every moment.'

'That's rough on me,' suggested Tarvin, glancing ruefully at the cliffs above them.

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‘Oh no. It has nothing to do with you.’

‘Yes,’ returned he, shutting his lips, ‘that’s just it.’

She could not help smiling a little again at his face.

‘I will never marry any one else, if it helps you any to know that, Nick,’ she said, with a sudden tenderness in her voice.

‘But you won’t marry me?’

‘No,’ she said quietly, firmly, simply.

He meditated this answer a moment in bitterness. They were riding at a walk, and he let the reins drop on his pony’s neck as he said, ‘Oh, well. Don’t matter about me. It isn’t all selfishness, dear. I do want you to stay for my own sake, I want you for my very own, I want you always beside me, I want you—want you; but it isn’t for that I ask you to stay. It’s because I can’t think of you throwing yourself into the dangers and horrors of that life alone, unprotected, a girl. I can’t think of it and sleep nights. I daren’t think of it. The thing’s monstrous. It’s hideous. It’s absurd. You won’t do it!’

‘I must not think of myself,’ she answered in a shaken voice. ‘I must think of them.’

‘But I must think of you. And you shan’t bribe me, you shan’t tempt me, to think of any one else. You take it all too hard. Dearest girl,’ he entreated, lowering his voice, ‘are you in charge of the misery of the earth? There is misery elsewhere, too, and pain. Can you stop it? You’ve got to live with the sound of the suffering of millions in your ears all your life, whatever you do. We’re all in for that. We can’t get away from it. We pay that price for daring to be happy for one little second.’

‘I know, I know. I’m not trying to save myself. I’m not trying to stifle the sound.’

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'No, but you are trying to stop it, and you can't. It's like trying to scoop up the ocean with a dipper. You can't do it. But you can spoil your life in trying; and if you've got a scheme by which you can come back and have a spoiled life over again, I know some one who hasn't. O Kate, I don't ask anything for myself—or, at least, I only ask everything—but do think of that a moment sometimes when you are putting your arms around the earth, and trying to lift it up in your soft little hands—you are spoiling more lives than your own. Great Scot, Kate, if you are looking for some misery to set right, you needn't go off this road. Begin on me.'

She shook her head sadly. 'I must begin where I see my duty, Nick. I don't say that I shall make much impression on the dreadful sum of human trouble, and I don't say it is for everybody to do what I'm going to try to do; but it's right for me. I know that, and that's all any of us can know. Oh, to be sure that people are a little better—if only a little better—because you have lived,' she exclaimed, the look of exaltation coming into her eyes; 'to know that you have lessened by the slightest bit the sorrow and suffering that must go on all the same, would be good. Even you must feel that, Nick,' she said, gently laying her hand on his arm as they rode.

Tarvin compressed his lips. 'Oh yes, I feel it,' he said desperately.

'But you feel something else. So do I.'

'Then feel it more. Feel it enough to trust yourself to me. I'll find a future for you. You shall bless everybody with your goodness. Do you think I should like you without it? And you shall begin by blessing me.'

'I can't! I can't!' she cried in distress.

'You can't do anything else. You must come to me

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at last. Do you think I could live if I didn't think that? But I want to save you all that lies between. I don't want you to be driven into my arms, little girl. I want you to come—and come now.'

For answer to this she only bowed her head on the sleeve of her riding-habit, and began to cry softly. Nick's fingers closed on the hand with which she nervously clutched the pommel of her saddle.

'You can't, dear?'

The brown head was shaken vehemently. Tarvin ground his teeth.

'All right; don't mind.'

He took her yielding hand into his, speaking gently, as he would have spoken to a child in distress. In the silent moment that lengthened between them Tarvin gave it up—not Kate, not his love, not his changeless resolve to have her for his own, but just the question of her going to India. She could go if she liked. There would be two of them.

When they reached the Hot Springs he took an immediate opportunity to engage the willing Mrs. Mutrie in talk, and to lead her aside, while Sheriff showed the president the water steaming out of the ground, the baths, and the proposed site of a giant hotel. Kate, willing to hide her red eyes from Mrs. Mutrie's sharp gaze, remained with her father.

When Tarvin had led the president's wife to the side of the stream that went plunging down past the Springs to find a tomb at last in the canon below, he stopped short in the shelter of a clump of cottonwoods.

'Do you really want that necklace?' he asked her abruptly.

She laughed again, gurglingly, amusedly, this time,

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with the little air of spectacle which she could not help lending to all she did.

‘Want it?’ she repeated. ‘Of course I want it. I want the moon, too.’

Tarvin laid a silencing hand upon her arm.

‘You shall have this,’ he said positively.

She ceased laughing, and grew almost pale at his earnestness.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked quickly.

‘It would please you? You would be glad of it?’ he asked. ‘What would you do to get it?’

‘Go back to Omaha on my hands and knees,’ she answered with equal earnestness. ‘Crawl to India.’

‘All right,’ returned Tarvin vigorously. ‘That settles it. Listen! I want the Three C.’s to come to Topaz. You want this. Can we trade?’

‘But you can never—’

‘No matter; I’ll attend to my part. Can you do yours?’

‘You mean—’ she began.

‘Yes,’ nodded her companion decisively; ‘I do. Can you fix it?’

Tarvin, fiercely repressed and controlled, stood before her with clenched teeth, and hands that drove the nails into his palms, awaiting her answer.

She tilted her fair head on one side with deprecation, and regarded him out of the vanishing angle of one eye provocatively, with a lingering, tantalising look of adequacy.

‘I guess what I say to Jim goes,’ she said at last with a dreamy smile.

‘Then it’s a bargain?’

‘Yes,’ she answered.

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'Shake hands on it.'

They joined hands. For a moment they stood confronted, penetrating each other's eyes.

'You'll really get it for me?'

'Yes.'

'You won't go back on me?'

'No.'

He pressed her hand so that she gave a little scream.

'Ouch! You hurt.'

'All right,' he said hoarsely, as he dropped her hand.

'It's a trade. I start for India to-morrow.'

V

Now, it is not good for the Christian's health to hustle
 the Aryan brown,
 For the Christian riles, and the Aryan smiles, and he
 weareth the Christian down;
 And the end of the fight is a tombstone white, with the
 name of the late deceased,
 And the epitaph drear: 'A fool lies here who tried to hus-
 tle the East.'

Solo from Libretto of 'Naulahka'

TARVIN stood on the platform of the station at Rawut Junction watching the dust cloud that followed the retreating Bombay mail. When it had disappeared, the heated air above the stone ballast began its dance again, and he turned blinking to India.

It was amazingly simple to come fourteen thousand miles. He had lain still in a ship for a certain time, and then had transferred himself to stretch at full length, in his shirt-sleeves, on the leather-padded bunk of the train which had brought him from Calcutta to Rawut Junction. The journey was long only as it kept him from sight of Kate, and kept him filled with thought of her. But was this what he had come for—the yellow desolation of a Rajputana desert, and the pinched-off perspective of the track? Topaz was cosier when they had got

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the church, the saloon, the school, and three houses up; the loneliness made him shiver. He saw that they did not mean to do any more of it. It was a desolation which doubled desolateness, because it was left for done. It was final, intended, absolute. The grim solidity of the cut-stone station-house, the solid masonry of the empty platform, the mathematical exactitude of the station name-board looked for no future. No new railroad could help Rawut Junction. It had no ambition. It belonged to the Government. There was no green thing, no curved line, no promise of life that produces, within eye-shot of Rawut Junction. The mauve railroad-creeper on the station had been allowed to die from lack of attention.

Tarvin was saved from the more positive pangs of home-sickness by a little healthy human rage. A single man, fat, brown, clothed in white gauze, and wearing a black velvet cap on his head, stepped out from the building. This stationmaster and permanent population of Rawut Junction accepted Tarvin as a feature of the landscape: he did not look at him. Tarvin began to sympathise with the South in the war of the rebellion.

'When does the next train leave for Rhatore?' he asked.

'There is no train,' returned the man, pausing with precise deliberation between the words. He sent his speech abroad with an air of detachment, irresponsibly, like the phonograph.

'No train? Where's your time-table? Where's your railroad guide? Where's your Pathfinder?'

'No train at all of any kind whatever.'

'Then what the devil are you here for?'

'Sir, I am the stationmaster of this station, and it is

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prohibited using profane language to employees of this company.'

'Oh, are you? Is it? Well, see here, my friend—you stationmaster of the steep-edge of the jumping-off-place of Nowhere, if you want to save your life you will tell me how I get to Rhatore—quick!'

The man was silent.

'Well, what do I do, anyway?' shouted the West.

'What do I know?' answered the East.

Tarvin stared at the brown being in white, beginning at his patent-leather shoes, surmounted by open-work socks, out of which the calf of his leg bulged, and ending with the velvet smoking-cap on his head. The passionless regard of the Oriental, borrowed from the purple hills behind his station, made him wonder for one profane, faithless, and spiritless moment whether Topaz and Kate were worth all they were costing.

'Ticket, please,' said the baboo.

The gloom darkened. This thing was here to take tickets, and would do it though men loved, and fought, and despaired and died at his feet.

'See here,' cried Tarvin, 'you shiny-toed fraud; you agate-eyed pillar of alabaster—' But he did not go on; speech failed in a shout of rage and despair. The desert swallowed all impartially; and the baboo, turning with awful quiet, drifted through the door of the station-house, and locked it behind him.

Tarvin whistled persuasively at the door with uplifted eyebrows, jingling an American quarter against a rupee in his pocket. The window of the ticket-office opened a little way, and the baboo showed an inch of impassive face.

'Speaking now in un-offeeshal capacity, your honour can getting to Rhatore via country bullock-cart.'

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‘Find me the bullock-cart,’ said Tarvin.

‘Your honour granting commission on transaction?’

‘Cert!’ It was the tone that conveyed the idea to the head under the smoking-cap.

The window was dropped. Afterward, but not too immediately afterward, a long-drawn howl made itself heard—the howl of a weary warlock invoking a dilatory ghost.

‘O Moti! Moti! O-oh!’

‘Ah, there, Moti!’ murmured Tarvin, as he vaulted over the low stone wall, gripsack in hand, and stepped out through the ticket wicket into Rajputana. His habitual gaiety and confidence had returned with the prospect of motion.

Between himself and a purple circle of hills lay fifteen miles of profitless, rolling ground, jagged with laterite rocks, and studded with unthrifty trees—all given up to drought and dust, and all colourless as the sun-bleached locks of a child of the prairies. Very far away to the right the silver gleam of a salt lake showed, and a formless blue haze of heavier forest. Sombre, desolate, oppressive, withering under a brazen sun, it smote him with its likeness to his own prairies, and with its homesick unlikeness.

Apparently out of a crack in the earth—in fact as he presently perceived, out of a spot where two waves of plain folded in upon each other and contained a village—came a pillar of dust, the heart of which was a bullock-cart. The distant whine of the wheels sharpened, as it drew near, to the full-bodied shriek that Tarvin knew when they put the brakes suddenly on a freight coming into Topaz on the down grade. But this was in no sense a freight. The wheels were sections of tree butts—

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square for the most part. Four unbarked poles bounded the corners of a flat body; the sides were made of netted rope of cocoa-nut fibre. Two bullocks, a little larger than Newfoundlands, smaller than Alderneys, drew a vehicle which might have contained the half of a horse's load.

The cart drew up at the station, and the bullocks, after contemplating Tarvin for a moment, lay down. Tarvin seated himself on his gripsack, rested his shaggy head in his hands, and expended himself in mirth.

'Sail in,' he instructed the baboo; 'make your bargain. I'm in no hurry.'

Then began a scene of declamation and riot, to which a quarrel in a Leadville gambling saloon was a poor matter. The impassiveness of the stationmaster deserted him like a wind-blown garment. He harangued, gesticulated, and cursed; and the driver, naked except for a blue loin-cloth, was nothing behind him. They pointed at Tarvin; they seemed to be arguing over his birth and ancestry; for all he knew they were appraising his weight. When they seemed to be on the brink of an amicable solution, the question reopened itself, and they went back to the beginning, and reclassified him and the journey.

Tarvin applauded both parties, sicking one on the other impartially for the first ten minutes. Then he besought them to stop, and when they would not he discovered that it was hot, and swore at them.

The driver had for the moment exhausted himself, when the baboo turned suddenly on Tarvin, and, clutching him by the arm, cried, almost shouting, 'All arrange, sir! all arrange! This man most uneducated man, sir. You giving me the money, I arrange everything.'

Swift as thought, the driver had caught his other arm,

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and was imploring him in a strange tongue not to listen to his opponent. As Tarvin stepped back they followed him with uplifted hands of entreaty and representation, the stationmaster forgetting his English, and the driver his respect for the white man. Tarvin, eluding them both, pitched his gripsack into the bullock-cart, bounded in himself, and shouted the one Indian word he knew. It happened, fortunately, to be the word that moves all India, 'Challo!' which, being interpreted, is 'Go on!'

So, leaving strife and desolation behind him, rode out into the desert of Rajputana Nicholas Tarvin of Topaz, Colorado!

VI

In the State of Kot-Kumharsen, where the wild dacoits
abound,

And the Thakurs live in castles on the hills,
Where the bunnia and bunjara in alternate streaks are
found,

And the Rajah cannot liquidate his bills;
Where the Agent Sahib Bahadur shoots the black buck
for his larder,

From the tonga which he uses as machan,
'Twas a White Man from the West, came expressly to
investigate the natural wealth of Hindustan.

Song from Libretto of 'Naulahka.'

UNDER certain conditions four days can dwarf
eternity. Tarvin had found these circumstances
in the bullock-cart from which he crawled ninety-
six hours after the bullocks had got up from the dust at
Rawut Junction. They stretched behind him—those
hours—in a maddening, creaking, dusty, deliberate pro-
cession. In an hour the bullock-cart went two and a
half miles. Fortunes had been made and lost in Topaz
—happy Topaz!—while the cart ploughed its way across
a red-hot river-bed, shut in between two walls of belted
sand. New cities might have risen in the West and
fallen to ruins older than Thebes while, after any of their
meals by the wayside, the driver droned over a water-

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pipe something less wieldy than a Gatling-gun. In these waits and in others—it seemed to him that the journey was chiefly made up of waits—Tarvin saw himself distanced in the race of life by every male citizen of the United States, and groaned with the consciousness that he could never overtake them, or make up this lost time.

Great gray cranes with scarlet heads stalked through the high grass of the swamps in the pockets of the hills. The snipe and the quail hardly troubled themselves to move from beneath the noses of the bullocks, and once in the dawn, lying upon a glistening rock, he saw two young panthers playing together like kittens.

A few miles from Rawut Junction his driver had taken from underneath the cart a sword which he hung around his neck, and sometimes used on the bullocks as a goad. Tarvin saw that every man went armed in this country, as in his own. But three feet of clumsy steel struck him as a poor substitute for the delicate and nimble revolver.

Once he stood up in the cart and hallooed, for he thought he saw the white top of a prairie schooner. But it was only a gigantic cotton-wain, drawn by sixteen bullocks, dipping and plunging across the ridges. Through all, the scorching Indian sun blazed down on him, making him wonder how he had ever dared praise the perpetual sunshine of Colorado. At dawn the rocks glittered like diamonds, and at noonday the sands of the rivers troubled his eyes with a million flashing sparks. At even-tide a cold, dry wind would spring up, and the hills lying along the horizon took a hundred colours under the light of the sunset. Then Tarvin realised the meaning of ‘the glorious East,’ for the hills were turned to heaps of ruby and amethyst, while between them the mists in the valleys were opal. He lay in the bullock-cart on his

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back and stared at the sky, dreaming of the Naulahka, and wondering whether it would match the scenery.

'The clouds know what I'm up to. It's a good omen,' he said to himself.

He cherished the definite and simple plan of buying the Naulahka and paying for it in good money to be raised at Topaz by bonding the town—not, of course, ostensibly for any such purpose. Topaz was good for it, he believed, and if the Maharajah wanted too steep a price when they came to talk business he would form a syndicate.

As the cart swayed from side to side, bumping his head, he wondered where Kate was. She might, under favourable conditions, be in Bombay by this time. That much he knew from careful consideration of her route; but a girl alone could not pass from hemisphere to hemisphere as swiftly as an unfettered man, spurred by love of herself and of Topaz. Perhaps she was resting for a little time with the Zenana Mission at Bombay. He refused absolutely to admit to himself that she had fallen ill by the way. She was resting, receiving her orders, absorbing a few of the wonders of the strange lands he had contemptuously thrust behind him in his eastward flight; but in a few days at most she ought to be at Rhatore, whither the bullock-cart was taking him.

He smiled and smacked his lips with pure enjoyment as he thought of their meeting, and amused himself with fancies about her fancies touching his present whereabouts.

He had left Topaz for San Francisco by the night train over the Pass a little more than twenty-four hours after his conference with Mrs. Mutrie, saying good-bye to no one, and telling nobody where he was going. Kate

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perhaps wondered at the fervour of his ‘Good evening’ when he left her at her father’s house on their return from their ride to the Hot Springs. But she said nothing, and Tarvin contrived by an effort to take himself off without giving himself away. He had made a quiet sale of a block of town lots the next day at a sacrifice, to furnish himself with money for the voyage; but this was too much in the way of his ordinary business to excite comment, and he was finally able to gaze down at the winking lights of Topaz in the valley from the rear platform of his train, as it climbed up over the Continental Divide, with the certainty that the town he was going to India to bless and boom was not ‘on to’ his beneficent scheme. To make sure that the right story went back to the town, he told the conductor of the train, in strict confidence, while he smoked his usual cigar with him, about a little placer-mining scheme in Alaska which he was going there to nurse for a while.

The conductor embarrassed him for a moment by asking what he was going to do about his election meanwhile; but Tarvin was ready for him here too. He said that he had that fixed. He had to let him into another scheme to show him how it was fixed, but as he bound him to secrecy again, this didn’t matter.

He wondered now, however, whether that scheme had worked, and whether Mrs. Mutrie would keep her promise to cable the result of the election to him at Rhatore. It was amusing to have to trust a woman to let him know whether he was a member of the Colorado legislature or not; but she was the only living person who knew his address, and as the idea had seemed to please her, in common with their whole ‘charming conspiracy’ (this was what she called it), Tarvin had been content.

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When he had become convinced that his eyes would never again be blessed with the sight of a white man, or his ears with the sound of intelligible speech, the cart rolled through a gorge between two hills, and stopped before the counterpart of the station at Rawut Junction. It was a double cube of red sandstone, but—for this Tarvin could have taken it in his arms—it was full of white men. They were undressed excessively; they were lying in the veranda in long chairs, and between each chair was a well-worn bullock trunk.

Tarvin got himself out of the cart, unfolding his long stiffened legs with difficulty, and unkinking his muscles one by one. He was a mask of dust—dust beyond sandstorms or cyclones. It had obliterated the creases of his clothing and turned his black American four-button cutaway to a pearly white. It had done away with the distinction between the hem of his trousers and the top of his shoes. It dropped off him and rolled up from him as he moved. His fervent ‘Thank God!’ was extinguished in a dusty cough. He stepped into the veranda, rubbing his smarting eyes.

‘Good evening, gentlemen,’ he said. ‘Got anything to drink?’

No one rose, but somebody shouted for the servant. A man dressed in thin Tussur silk, yellow and ill-fitting as the shuck on a dried cob, and absolutely colourless as to his face, nodded to him and asked languidly—

‘Who are you for?’

‘No? Have they got them here too?’ said Tarvin to himself, recognising in that brief question the universal shibboleth of the commercial traveller.

He went down the long line and twisted each hand in pure joy and thankfulness before he began to draw com-

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parisons between the East and the West, and to ask himself if these idle, silent lotus-eaters could belong to the profession with which he had swapped stories, commodities, and political opinions this many a year in smoking-cars and hotel offices. Certainly they were debased and spiritless parodies of the alert, aggressive, joyous, brazen animals whom he knew as the drummers of the West. But perhaps—a twinge in his back reminded him—they had all reached this sink of desolation via country bullock-cart.

He thrust his nose into twelve inches of whisky and soda, and remained there till there was no more; then dropped into a vacant chair and surveyed the group again.

'Did some one ask who I was for? I'm for myself, I suppose, as much as any one—travelling for pleasure.'

He had not time to enjoy the absurdity of this, for all five men burst into a shout of laughter, like the laughter of men who have long been estranged from mirth.

'Pleasure!' cried one. 'O Lord! Pleasure! You've come to the wrong place.'

'It's just as well you've come for pleasure. You'd be dead before you did business,' said another.

'You might as well try to get blood out of a stone. I've been here over a fortnight.'

'Great Scot! What for?' asked Tarvin.

'We've all been here over a week,' growled a fourth.

'But what's your lay? What's your racket?'

'Guess you're an American, ain't you?'

'Yes; Topaz, Colorado.' The statement had no effect upon them. He might as well have spoken in Greek. 'But what's the trouble?'

'Why, the King married two wives yesterday. You

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can hear the gongs going in the city now. He's trying to equip a new regiment of cavalry for the service of the Indian Government, and he's quarrelled with his Political Resident. I've been living at Colonel Nolan's door for three days. He says he can't do anything without authority from the supreme Government. I've tried to catch the King when he goes out pig-shooting. I write every day to the Prime Minister, when I'm not riding around the city on a camel; and here's a bunch of letters from the firm asking why I don't collect.'

At the end of ten minutes Tarvin began to understand that these washed-out representatives of half a dozen firms in Calcutta and Bombay were hopelessly besieging this place on their regular spring campaign to collect a little on account from a king who ordered by the ton and paid by the scruple. He had purchased guns, dressing-cases, mirrors, mantelpiece ornaments, crochet work, iridescent Christmas-tree glass balls, saddlery, mail-phætons, four-in-hands, scent-bottles, surgical instruments, chandeliers and chinaware by the dozen, gross, or score as his royal fancy prompted. When he lost interest in his purchases he lost interest in paying for them; and as few things amused his jaded fancy more than twenty minutes, it sometimes came to pass that the mere purchase was sufficient, and the costly packing-cases from Calcutta were never opened. The ordered peace of the Indian Empire forbade him to take up arms against his fellow-sovereigns, the only lasting delight that he or his ancestors had known for thousands of years; but there remained a certain modified interest of war in battling with bill-collectors. On one side stood the Political Resident of the State, planted there to teach him good government, and, above all, economy;

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on the other side—that is to say, at the palace gates—might generally be found a commercial traveller, divided between his contempt of an evasive debtor and his English reverence for a king. Between these two his Majesty went forth to take his pleasure in pig-sticking, in racing, in the drilling of his army, in the ordering of more unnecessaries, and in the fitful government of his woman-kind, who knew considerably more of each commercial traveller's claims than even the Prime Minister. Behind these was the Government of India, explicitly refusing to guarantee payment of the King's debts, and from time to time sending him, on a blue velvet cushion, the jewelled insignia of an imperial Order to sweeten the remonstrances of the Political Resident.

'Well, I hope you make the King pay for it,' said Tarvin.

'How's that?'

'Why, in my country, when a customer sillies about like that, promising to meet a man one day at the hotel and not showing up, and then promising to meet him the next day at the store and not paying, a drummer says to himself, "Oh, all right! If you want to pay my board and my wine, liquor, and cigar bill while I wait, don't mind me. I'll mosey along somehow." And after the second day he charges up his poker losings to him.'

'Ah, that's interesting. But how does he get those items into his account?'

'They go into the next bill of goods he sells him, of course. He makes the prices right for that.'

'Oh, we can make prices right enough. The difficulty is to get your money.'

'But I don't see how you fellows have the time to monkey around here at this rate,' urged Tarvin, mystified.

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‘Where I come from a man makes his trip on schedule time, and when he’s a day behind he’ll wire to his customer in the town ahead to come down to the station and meet him, and he’ll sell him a bill of goods while the train waits. He could sell him the earth while one of your bullock-carts went a mile. And as to getting your money, why don’t you get out an attachment on the old sinner? In your places I’d attach the whole country on him. I’d attach the palace, I’d attach his crown. I’d get a judgment against him, and I’d execute it too—personally, if necessary. I’d lock the old fellow up and rule Rajputana for him, if I had to; but I’d have his money.’

A compassionate smile ran around the group. ‘That’s because you don’t know,’ said several at once. Then they began to explain voluminously. There was no languor about them now; they all spoke together.

The men in the veranda, though they seemed idle, were no fools, Tarvin perceived after a time. Lying still as beggars at the gate of greatness was their method of doing business. It wasted time, but in the end some sort of payment was sure to be made, especially, explained the man in the yellow coat, if you could interest the Prime Minister in your needs, and through him wake the interests of the King’s women.

A flicker of memory made Tarvin smile faintly, as he thought of Mrs. Mutrie.

The man in the yellow coat went on, and Tarvin learned that the head queen was a murderer, convicted of poisoning her former husband. She had lain crouching in an iron cage awaiting execution when the King first saw her, and the King had demanded whether she would poison him if he married her, so the tale ran. Assuredly, she replied, if he treated her as her late husband

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had treated her. Thereupon the King had married her, partly to please his fancy, mainly through sheer delight in her brutal answer.

This gipsy without lineage held in less than a year King and State under her feet—feet which women of the household sang spitefully were roughened with travel of shameful roads. She had borne the King one son, in whom all her pride and ambition centred, and, after his birth, she had applied herself with renewed energy to the maintenance of mastery in the State. The supreme Government, a thousand miles away, knew that she was a force to be reckoned with, and had no love for her. The white-haired, soft-spoken Political Resident, Colonel Nolan, who lived in the pink house, a bow-shot from the city gates, was often thwarted by her. Her latest victory was peculiarly humiliating to him, for she had discovered that a rock-hewn canal, designed to supply the city with water in summer, would pass through an orange-garden under her window, and had used her influence with the Maharajah against it. The Maharajah had thereupon caused it to be taken around by another way at an expense of a quarter of his year's revenue, and in the teeth of the almost tearful remonstrance of the Resident.

Sitabhai, the gipsy, behind her silken curtains, had both heard and seen this interview between the rajah and his Political, and had laughed.

Tarvin devoured all this eagerly. It fed his purpose; it was grist to his mill, even if it tumbled his whole plan of attack topsy-turvy. It opened up a new world for which he had no measures and standards, and in which he must be frankly and constantly dependent on the inspiration of the next moment. He couldn't know too

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much of this world before taking his first step toward the Naulahka, and he was willing to hear all these lazy fellows would tell him. He began to feel as if he should have to go back and learn his A B C's over again. What pleased this strange being they called King? what appealed to him? what tickled him? above all, what did he fear?

He was thinking much and rapidly.

But he said, 'No wonder your King is bankrupt if he has such a court to look after.'

'He's one of the richest princes in India,' returned the man in the yellow coat. 'He doesn't know himself what he has.'

'Why doesn't he pay his debts, then, instead of keeping you mooning about here?'

'Because he's a native. He'd spend a hundred thousand pounds on a marriage feast, and delay payment of a bill for two hundred rupees four years.'

'You ought to cure him of that,' insisted Tarvin. 'Send a sheriff after the crown jewels.'

'You don't know Indian princes. They would pay a bill before they would let the crown jewels go. They are sacred. They are part of the government.'

'Ah, I'd give something to see the Luck of the State!' exclaimed a voice from one of the chairs, which Tarvin afterward learned belonged to the agent of a Calcutta firm of jewellers.

'What's that?' he asked, as casually as he knew how, sipping his whisky and soda.

'The Naulahka. Don't you know?'

Tarvin was saved the need of an answer by the man in yellow. 'Pshaw! All that talk about the Naulahka is invented by the priests.'

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'I don't think so,' returned the jeweller's agent judicially. 'The King told me when I was last here that he had once shown it to a viceroy. But he is the only foreigner who has ever seen it. The King assured me he didn't know where it was himself.'

'Pooh! Do you believe in carved emeralds two inches square?' asked the other, turning to Tarvin.

'That's only the centre-piece,' said the jeweller; 'and I wouldn't mind wagering that it's a tallow-drop emerald. It isn't that that staggers me. My wonder is how these chaps, who don't care anything for water in a stone, could have taken the trouble to get together half a dozen perfect gems, much less fifty. They say that the necklace was begun when William the Conqueror came over.'

'That gives them a year or two,' said Tarvin. 'I would undertake to get a little jewellery together myself if you gave me eight centuries.'

His face was turned a little away from them as he lay back in his chair. His heart was going quickly. He had been through mining-trades, land-speculations, and cattle-deals in his time. He had known moments when the turn of a hair, the wrinkle of an eyelid, meant ruin to him. But they were not moments into which eight centuries were gathered.

They looked at him with a remote pity in their eyes.

'Five absolutely perfect specimens of the nine precious stones,' began the jeweller; 'the ruby, emerald, sapphire, diamond, opal, cat's-eye, turquoise, amethyst, and—'

'Topaz?' asked Tarvin, with the air of a proprietor.

'No; black diamond—black as night.'

'But how do you know all these things—how do you get on to them?' asked Tarvin curiously.

'Like everything else in a native state—common talk,

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but difficult to prove. Nobody can as much as guess where that necklace is.'

'Probably under the foundations of some temple in the city,' said the yellow-coated man.

Tarvin, in spite of the careful guard he was keeping over himself, could not help kindling at this. He saw himself digging the city up.

'Where is this city?' inquired he.

They pointed across the sun-glare, and showed him a rock girt by a triple line of wall. It was exactly like one of the many ruined cities that Tarvin had passed in the bullock-cart. A rock of a dull and angry red surmounted that rock. Up to the foot of the rock ran the yellow sands of the actual desert—the desert that supports neither tree nor shrub, only the wild ass, and somewhere in its heart, men say, the wild camel.

Tarvin stared through the palpitating haze of heat, and saw that there was neither life nor motion about the city. It was a little after noonday, and his Majesty's subjects were asleep. This solid block of loneliness, then, was the visible end of his journey—the Jericho he had come from Topaz to attack.

And he reflected, 'Now, if a man should come from New York in a bullock-cart to whistle around the Sau-guache Range, I wonder what sort of fool I'd call him!'

He rose and stretched his dusty limbs. 'What time does it get cool enough to take in the town?' he asked.

'Do what to the town? Better be careful. You might find yourself in difficulties with the Resident,' warned his friendly adviser.

Tarvin could not understand why a stroll through the deadliest town he had ever seen should be forbidden. But he held his peace, inasmuch as he was in a strange

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country, where nothing, save a certain desire for command on the part of the women, was as he had known it. He would take in the town thoroughly. Otherwise he began to fear that its monumental sloth—there was still no sign of life upon the walled rock—would swallow him up, or turn him into a languid Calcutta drummer.

Something must be done at once before his wits were numbed. He inquired the way to the telegraph-office, half doubting, even though he saw the wires, the existence of a telegraph in Rhatore.

‘By the way,’ one of the men called after him, ‘it’s worth remembering that any telegram you send here is handed all round the court and shown to the King.’

Tarvin thanked him, and thought this was worth remembering, as he trudged on through the sand toward a desecrated Mohammedan mosque near the road to the city which was doing duty as a telegraph-office.

A trooper of the State was lying fast asleep on the threshold, his horse picketed to a long bamboo lance driven into the ground. Other sign of life there was none, save a few doves cooing sleepily in the darkness under the arch.

Tarvin gazed about him dispiritedly for the blue and white sign of the Western Union, or its analogue in this queer land. He saw that the telegraph wires disappeared through a hole in the dome of the mosque. There were two or three low wooden doors under the archway. He opened one at random, and stepped upon a warm, hairy body, which sprang up with a grunt. Tarvin had hardly time to draw back before a young buffalo calf rushed out. Undisturbed, he opened another door, disclosing a flight of steps eighteen inches wide. Up these he travelled with difficulty, hoping to catch the sound

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of the ticker. But the building was as silent as the tomb it had once been. He opened another door, and stumbled into a room, the domed ceiling of which was inlaid with fretted tracery in barbaric colours, picked out with myriads of tiny fragments of mirrors. The flood of colour and the glare of the snow-white floor made him blink after the pitchy darkness of the staircase. Still, the place was undoubtedly a telegraph-office, for an antiquated instrument was clamped upon a cheap dressing-table. The sunlight streamed through the gash in the dome which had been made to admit the telegraph wires, and which had not been repaired.

Tarvin stood in the sunlight and stared about him. He took off the soft, wide-brimmed Western hat, which he was finding too warm for this climate, and mopped his forehead. As he stood in the sunlight, straight, clean-limbed, and strong, one who lurked in this mysterious spot with designs upon him would have decided that he did not look a wholesome person to attack. He pulled at the long thin moustache which drooped at the corners of his mouth in a curve shaped by the habit of tugging at it in thought, and muttered picturesque remarks in a tongue to which these walls had never echoed. What chance was there of communicating with the United States of America from this abyss of oblivion? Even the 'damn' that came back to him from the depths of the dome sounded foreign and inexpressive.

A sheeted figure lay on the floor. 'It takes a dead man to run this place!' exclaimed Tarvin, discovering the body. 'Hallo, you! Get up there!'

The figure rose to its feet with grunts, cast away its covering, and disclosed a very sleepy native in a complete suit of dove-coloured satin.

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'Ho!' cried he.

'Yes,' returned Tarvin imperturbably.

'You want to see me?'

'No; I want to send a telegram, if there's any electric fluid in this old tomb.'

'Sir,' said the native affably, 'you have come to right shop. I am telegraph operator and postmaster-general of this State.'

He seated himself in the decayed chair, opened a drawer of the table, and began to search for something.

'What you looking for, young man? Lost your connection with Calcutta?'

'Most gentlemen bring their own forms,' he said, with a distant note of reproach in his bland manner. 'But here is form. Have you got pencil?'

'Oh, see here, don't let me strain this office. Hadn't you better go and lie down again? I'll tap the message off myself. What's your signal for Calcutta?'

'You, sir, not understanding this instrument.'

'Don't I? You ought to see me milk the wires at election time.'

'This instrument require most judeecious handling, sir. You write message. I send. That is proper division of labour. Ha! ha!'

Tarvin wrote his message, which ran thus:—

'Getting there. Remember Three C.'s.—Tarvin.'

It was addressed to Mrs. Mutrie at the address she had given him in Denver.

'Rush it!' he said, as he handed it back over the table to the smiling image.

'All right; no fear. I am here for that,' returned the

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native, understanding in general terms from the cabalistic word that his customer was in haste.

'Will the thing ever get there?' drawled Tarvin, as he leaned over the table and met the gaze of the satin-cloth being with an air of good-comradeship, which invited him to let him into the fraud, if there was one.

'Oh yes; to-morrow. Denver is in the United States America,' said the native, looking up at Tarvin with childish glee in the sense of knowledge.

'Shake!' exclaimed Tarvin, offering him a hairy fist. 'You've been well brought up.'

He stayed half an hour fraternising with the man on the foundation of this common ground of knowledge, and saw him work the message off on his instrument, his heart going out on that first click all the way home. In the midst of the conversation the native suddenly dived into the cluttered drawer of the dressing-table, and drew forth a telegram covered with dust which he offered to Tarvin's scrutiny.

'You knowing any new Englishman coming to Rhatore name Turpin?' he asked.

Tarvin stared at the address a moment, and then tore open the envelope to find, as he expected, that it was for him. It was from Mrs. Mutrie, congratulating him on his election to the Colorado legislature by a majority of 1518 over Sheriff.

Tarvin uttered an abandoned howl of joy, executed a war-dance on the white floor of the mosque, snatched the astounded operator from behind his table, and whirled him away into a mad waltz. Then, making a low salaam to the now wholly bewildered native, he rushed from the building, waving his cable in the air, and went capering up the road.

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When he was back at the rest-house again he retired to a bath to grapple seriously with the dust of the desert, while the commercial travellers without discussed his comings and goings. He plunged about luxuriously in a gigantic bowl of earthenware; while a brown-skinned water-carrier sluiced the contents of a goat-skin over his head.

A voice in the veranda, a little louder than the others, said, 'He's probably come prospecting for gold, or boring for oil, and won't tell.'

Tarvin winked a wet left eye.

VII

There is pleasure in the wet, wet clay,
When the artist's hand is potting it;
There is pleasure in the wet, wet lay,
When the poet's pad is blotting it;
There is pleasure in the shine of your picture on the line
At the Royal Acade-my;
But the pleasure felt in these is as chalk to Cheddar
cheese,
When it comes to a well-made Lie.
To a quite unwreckable Lie,
To a most impeccable Lie,
To a water-tight, fireproof, angle-iron, sunk-hinge, time-
lock, steel-faced Lie!
Not a private hansom Lie,
But a pair-and-brougham Lie,
Not a little-place-at-Tooting, but a country-house-with-
shooting,
And a ring-fence-deer-park Lie.

—Op. 3.

A COMMON rest-house in the desert is not over-stocked with furniture or carpets. One table, two chairs, a rack on the door for clothing, and a list of charges, are sufficient for each room; and the traveller brings his own bedding. Tarvin read the tariff with deep interest before falling asleep that night, and

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discovered that this was only in a distant sense a hotel, and that he was open to the danger of being turned out at twelve hours' notice, after he had inhabited his unhomely apartment for a day and a night.

Before he went to bed he called for pen and ink, and wrote a letter to Mrs. Mutrie on the notepaper of his land and improvement company. Under the map of Colorado, at the top, which confidently showed the railroad system of the State converging at Topaz, was the legend, 'N. Tarvin, Real Estate and Insurance Agent.' The tone of his letter was even more assured than the map.

He dreamed that night that the Maharajah was swapping the Naulahka with him for town lots. His Majesty backed out just as they were concluding the deal, and demanded that Tarvin should throw in his own favourite mine, the 'Lingering Lode,' to boot. In his dream Tarvin had kicked at this, and the Rajah had responded, 'All right, my boy; no Three C.'s then,' and Tarvin had yielded the point, had hung the Naulahka about Mrs. Mutrie's neck, and in the same breath had heard the speaker of the Colorado legislature declaring that since the coming of the Three C.'s he officially recognised Topaz as the metropolis of the West. Then, perceiving that he himself was the speaker, Tarvin began to doubt the genuineness of these remarks, and awoke, with alocs in his mouth, to find the dawn spreading over Rhatore, and beckoning him out to the conquests of reality.

He was confronted in the veranda by a grizzled, bearded, booted native soldier on a camel, who handed down to him a greasy little brown book, bearing the legend 'Please write "seen."'

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Tarvin looked at this new development from the heated landscape with interest, but not with an outward effect of surprise. He had already learned one secret of the East—never to be surprised at anything. He took the book and read, on a thumbed page, the announcement, ‘Divine services conducted on Sundays in the drawing-room of the residency at 7.30 a. m. Strangers are cordially invited to attend. (Signed) L. R. Estes, American Presbyterian Mission.’

‘They don’t get up early for nothing in this country,’ mused Tarvin. ‘“Church at 7.30 a. m.” When do they have dinner? Well, what do I do about this?’ he asked the man aloud. The trooper and camel looked at him together, and grunted as they went away. It was no concern of theirs.

Tarvin addressed a remark of confused purport to the retreating figures. This was plainly not a country in which business could be done at red heat. He hungered for the moment when, with the necklace in his pocket and Kate by his side, he should again set his face westward.

The shortest way to that was to go over to call on the missionary. He was an American, and could tell him about the Naulahka if anybody could; Tarvin had also a shrewd suspicion that he could tell him something about Kate.

The missionary’s home, which was just without the city walls, was also of red sandstone, one story high, and as bare of vines or any living thing as the station at Rawut Junction. But he presently found that there were living beings inside the house, with warm hearts and a welcome for him. Mrs. Estes turned out to be that motherly and kindly woman, with the instinct for house-

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keeping, who would make a home of a cave. She had a round, smooth face, a soft skin, and quiet, happy eyes. She may have been forty. Her still untinged brown hair was brushed smoothly back; her effect was sedate and restful.

Their visitor had learned that they came from Bangor, Maine, had founded a tie of brotherhood on the fact that his father had been born on a farm down Portland way, and had been invited to breakfast before he had been ten minutes in the house. Tarvin's gift of sympathy was irresistible. He was the kind of man to whom men confide their heart-secrets, and the canker of their inmost lives, in hotel smoking-rooms. He was the repository of scores of tales of misery and error which he could do nothing to help, and of a few which he could help, and had helped. Before breakfast was ready he had from Estes and his wife the whole picture of their situation at Rhatore. They told him of their troubles with the Maharajah and with the Maharajah's wives, and of the exceeding unfruitfulness of their work; and then of their children, living in the exile of Indian children, at home. They explained that they meant Bangor; they were there with an aunt, receiving their education at the hands of a public school.

'It's five years since we saw them,' said Mrs. Estes, as they sat down to breakfast. 'Fred was only six when he went, and Laura was eight. They are eleven and thirteen now—only think! We hope they haven't forgotten us; but how can they remember? They are only children.'

And then she told him stories of the renewal of filial ties in India, after such absences, that made his blood run cold.

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The breakfast woke a violent home-sickness in Tarvin. After a month at sea, two days of the chance railroad meals between Calcutta and Rawut Junction, and a night at the rest-house, he was prepared to value the homely family meal, and the abundance of an American breakfast. They began with a water-melon, which did not help him to feel at home, because water-melons were next to an unknown luxury at Topaz, and when known, did not ripen in grocers' windows in the month of April. But the oatmeal brought him home again, and the steak and fried potatoes, the coffee and the hot brown popovers, with their beguiling yellow interiors, were reminders far too deep for tears. Mrs. Estes, enjoying his enjoyment, said they must have out the can of maple syrup which had been sent them all the way from Bangor; and when the white-robed, silent-moving servant in the red turban came in with the waffles, she sent him for it. They were all very happy together over this, and said pleasant things about the American Republic, while the punkah sang its droning song over their heads.

Tarvin had a map of Colorado in his pocket, of course, and when the talk, swinging to one part of the United States and another, worked westward, he spread it out on the breakfast-table, between the waffles and the steak, and showed them the position of Topaz. He explained to Estes how a new railroad, running north and south, would make the town, and then he had to say affectionately what a wonderful town it really was, and to tell them about the buildings they had put up in the last twelve months, and how they had picked themselves up after the fire and gone to building the next morning. The fire had brought \$100,000 into the town in insurance, he said. He exaggerated his exaggerations in uncon-

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scious defiance of the hugeness of the empty landscape lying outside the window. He did not mean to let the East engulf him or Topaz.

'We've got a young lady coming to us, I think, from your State,' interrupted Mrs. Estes, to whom all Western towns were alike. 'Wasn't it Topaz, Lucien? I'm almost sure it was.'

She rose and went to her work-basket for a letter, from which she confirmed her statement. 'Yes; Topaz. A Miss Sheriff. She comes to us from the Zenana Mission. Perhaps you know her?'

Tarvin's head bent over the map, which he was refolding. He answered shortly, 'Yes; I know her. When is she likely to be here?'

'Most any day now,' said Mrs. Estes.

'It seems a pity,' said Tarvin, 'to bring a young girl out here all alone, away from her friends—though I'm sure you'll be friends to her,' he added quickly, seeking Mrs. Estes' eyes.

'We shall try to keep her from getting home-sick,' said Mrs. Estes, with the motherly note in her voice. 'There's Fred and Laura home in Bangor, you know,' she added after a pause.

'That will be good of you,' said Tarvin, with more feeling than the interests of the Zenana Mission demanded.

'May I ask what your business is here?' inquired the missionary, as he passed his cup to his wife to be refilled. He had a rather formal habit of speech, and his words came muffled from the depths of a dense jungle of beard—iron-gray and unusually long. He had a benevolently grim face, a precise but friendly manner, and a good way of looking one in the eye which Tarvin liked. He was a

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man of decided opinions, particularly about the native races of India.

'Well, I'm prospecting,' Tarvin said, in a leisurely tone, glancing out of the window as if he expected to see Kate start up out of the desert.

'Ah! For gold?'

'W-e-l-l, yes; as much that as anything.'

Estes invited him out upon the veranda to smoke a cigar with him; his wife brought her sewing and sat with them; and as they smoked Tarvin asked him his questions about the Naulahka. Where was it? What was it? he inquired boldly. But he found that the missionary, though an American, was no wiser about it than the lazy commercial travellers at the rest-house. He knew that it existed, but knew no man who had seen it save the Maharajah. Tarvin got at this through much talk about other things which interested him less; but he began to see an idea in the gold-mining to which the missionary persistently returned. Estes said he meant to engage in placer-mining, of course?

'Of course,' assented Tarvin.

'But you won't find much gold in the Amet River, I fancy. The natives have washed it spasmodically for hundreds of years. There is nothing to be found but what little silt washes down from the quartz rocks of the Gungra Hills. But you will be undertaking work on a large scale, I judge?' said the missionary, looking at him curiously.

'Oh, on a large scale, of course.'

Estes added that he supposed he had thought of the political difficulties in his way. He would have to get the consent of Colonel Nolan, and through him the consent of the British Government, if he meant to do any-

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thing serious in the State. In fact, he would have to get Colonel Nolan's consent to stay in Rhatore at all.

'Do you mean that I shall have to make it worth the British Government's while to let me alone?'

'Yes.'

'All right; I'll do that too.'

Mrs. Estes looked up quickly at her husband from under her eyebrows. Woman-like, she was thinking.

VIII

When a Lover hies abroad,
 Looking for his Love,
Azrael smiling sheathes his sword,
 Heaven smiles above.

Earth and Sea
His servants be,
And to lesser compass round,
That his Love be sooner found.

Chorus from Libretto to 'Naulahka.'

TARVIN learned a number of things within the next week; and with what the West calls 'adaptability,' put on, with the complete suit of white linen which he donned the second day, an initiation into a whole new system of manners, usages, and traditions. They were not all agreeable, but they were all in a good cause, and he took pains to see that his new knowledge should not go for nothing, by securing an immediate presentation to the only man in the State of whom it was definitely assertable that he had seen the object of his hopes. Estes willingly presented him to the Maharajah. The missionary and he rode one morning up the steep slopes of the rock on which stood the palace, itself rock-hewn. Passing through a deep archway, they entered a marble-flagged courtyard, and there found the Maharajah, attended by one ragged and out-at-elbow menial,

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discussing the points of a fox-terrier, which was lying before him on the flags.

Tarvin, unversed in kings, had expected a certain amount of state from one who did not pay his bills, and might be reasonably expected to cultivate reserve; but he was not prepared for the slovenly informality of a ruler in his everyday garb, released from the duty of behaving with restraint in the presence of a viceroy, nor for the picturesque mixture of dirt and decoration about the court. The Maharajah proved a large and amiable despot, brown and bush-bearded, arrayed in a gold-sprigged, green velvet dressing-gown, who appeared only too delighted to meet a man who had no connection with the Government of India, and who never mentioned the subject of money.

The disproportionate smallness of his hands and feet showed that the ruler of Gokral Seetarun came of the oldest blood in Rajputana; his fathers had fought hard and ridden far with sword-hilts and stirrups that would hardly serve an English child. His face was bloated and sodden, and the dull eyes stared wearily above deep, rugged pouches. To Tarvin, accustomed to read the motives of Western men in their faces, there seemed to be neither fear nor desire in those eyes—only an everlasting weariness. It was like looking at an extinct volcano—a volcano that rumbled in good English.

Tarvin had a natural interest in dogs, and the keenest possible desire to ingratiate himself with the ruler of the State. As a king he considered him something of an imposture, but as a brother dog-fancier, and the lord of the Naulahka, he was to Tarvin more than a brother; that is to say, the brother of one's beloved. He spoke eloquently and to the point.

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'Come again,' said the Maharajah, with a light of real interest in his eyes, as Estes, a little scandalised, drew off his guest. 'Come again this evening after dinner. You have come from new countries?'

His Majesty, later, carried away by the evening draught of opium, without which no Rajput can talk or think, taught this irreverent stranger, who told him tales of white men beyond the seas, the royal game of pachisi. They played it far into the night, in the marble-flagged courtyard, surrounded by green shutters from behind which Tarvin could hear, without turning his head, the whisper of watching women and the rustle of silken robes. The palace, he saw, was all eyes.

Next morning, at dawn, he found the King waiting at the head of the main street of his city for a certain notorious wild boar to come home. The game laws of Gokral Seetarun extended to the streets of walled towns, and the wild pig rooted unconcerned at night in the alley-ways. The pig came, and was dropped, at a hundred yards, by his Majesty's new Express rifle. It was a clean shot, and Tarvin applauded cordially. Had his Majesty the King ever seen a flying coin hit by a pistol bullet? The weary eyes brightened with childish delight. The King had not seen this feat and had not the coin. Tarvin flung an American quarter skyward, and clipped it with his revolver as it fell. Thereupon the King begged him to do it again, which Tarvin, valuing his reputation, politely declined to do unless one of the court officials would set the example.

The King was himself anxious to try, and Tarvin threw the coin for him. The bullet whizzed unpleasantly close to Tarvin's ear, but the quarter on the grass was dented when he picked it up. The King liked Tarvin's dent as

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well as if it had been his own, and Tarvin was not the man to undeceive him.

The following morning the royal favour was completely withdrawn, and it was not until he had conferred with the disconsolate drummers in the rest-house that Tarvin learned that Sitabhai had been indulging one of her queenly rages. On this he transferred himself and his abundant capacity for interesting men off-hand to Colonel Nolan, and made that weary white-haired man laugh as he had not laughed since he had been a subaltern over an account of the King's revolver-practice. Tarvin shared his luncheon, and discovered from him in the course of the afternoon the true policy of the Government of India in regard to the State of Gokral Seetarun. The Government hoped to elevate it; but as the Maharajah would not pay for the means of civilisation, the progress was slow. Colonel Nolan's account of the internal policy of the palace, given with official caution, was absolutely different from the missionary's, which again differed entirely from the profane account of the men in the rest-house.

At twilight the Maharajah pursued Tarvin with a mounted messenger, for the favour of the royal countenance was restored, and he required the presence of the tall man who clipped coins in the air, told tales, and played pachisi. There was more than pachisi upon the board that night, and his Majesty the King grew pathetic, and confided to Tarvin a long and particular account of his own and the State's embarrassments, which presented everything in a fourth new light. He concluded with an incoherent appeal to the President of the United States, on whose illimitable powers and far-reaching authority Tarvin dwelt, with a patriotism extended for

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the moment to embrace the nation to which Topaz belonged. For many reasons he did not conceive that this was an auspicious time to open negotiations for the transfer of the Naulahka. The Maharajah would have given away half his kingdom, and appealed to the Resident in the morning.

The next day, and many succeeding days, brought to the door of the rest-house, where Tarvin was still staying, a procession of rainbow-clad Orientals, ministers of the court each one, who looked with contempt on the waiting commercial travellers, and deferentially made themselves known to Tarvin whom they warned in fluent and stilted English against trusting anybody except themselves. Each confidence wound up with, ‘And I am your true friend, sir’; and each man accused his fellows to the stranger of every crime against the State, or ill-will toward the Government of India, that it had entered his own brain to conceive.

Tarvin could only faintly conjecture what all this meant. It seemed to him no extraordinary mark of court favour to play pachisi with the King, and the mazes of Oriental diplomacy were dark to him. The ministers were equally at a loss to understand him. He had walked in upon them from out the sky-line, utterly self-possessed, utterly fearless, and, so far as they could see, utterly disinterested; the greater reason, therefore, for suspecting that he was a veiled emissary of the Government, whose plans they could not fathom. That he was barbarously ignorant of everything pertaining to the Government of India only confirmed their belief. It was enough for them to know that he went to the King in secret, was closeted with him for hours, and possessed for the time being, the royal ear.

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These smooth-voiced, stately, mysterious strangers filled Tarvin with weariness and disgust, and he took out his revenge upon the commercial travellers, to whom he sold stock in his land and improvement company between their visits. The yellow-coated man, as his first friend and adviser, he allowed to purchase a very few shares in the ‘Lingering Lode,’ on the dead quiet. It was before the days of the gold boom in Lower Bengal, and there was still faith in the land.

These transactions took him back in fancy to Topaz, and made him long for some word about the boys at home, from whom he had absolutely cut himself off by this secret expedition, in which he was playing, necessarily alone, for the high stake common to them both. He would have given all the rupees in his pocket at any moment for a sight of the ‘Topaz Telegram,’ or even for a look at a Denver daily. What was happening to his mines—to the ‘Mollie K.,’ which was being worked on a lease; to the ‘Mascot,’ which was the subject of a legal dispute; to the ‘Lingering Lode,’ where they had been on the point of striking it very rich when he left; and to his ‘Garfield’ claim, which Fibby Winks had jumped? What had become of the mines of all his friends, of their cattle-ranches, of their deals? What, in fine, had become of Colorado and of the United States of America? They might have legislated silver out of existence at Washington, for all he knew, and turned the republic into a monarchy at the old stand.

His single resource from these pangs was his visits to the house of the missionary, where they talked Bangor, Maine, in the United States. To that house he knew that every day was bringing nearer the little girl he had come half way round the world to keep in sight.

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In the splendour of a yellow and violet morning, ten days after his arrival, he was roused from his sleep by a small, shrill voice in the veranda demanding the immediate attendance of the new Englishman. The Maharaj Kunwar, heir-apparent to the throne of Gokral Sectarun, a wheat-coloured child, aged nine, had ordered his miniature court which was held quite distinct from his father's, to equip his C-spring barouche, and to take him to the rest-house.

Like his jaded father, the child required amusement. All the women of the palace had told him that the new Englishman made the King laugh. The Maharaj Kunwar could speak English much better than his father—French too, for the matter of that—and he was anxious to show off his accomplishments to a court whose applause he had not yet commanded.

Tarvin obeyed the voice because it was a child's, and came out to find an apparently empty barouche, and an escort of ten gigantic troopers.

'How do you do? Comment vous portez-vous? I am the Prince of this State. I am the Maharaj Kunwar. Some day I shall be king. Come for a drive with me.'

A tiny mitten hand was extended in greeting. The mittens were of the crudest magenta wool, with green stripes at the wrist; but the child was robed in stiff gold brocade from head to foot, and in his turban was set an aigrette of diamonds six inches high, while emeralds in a thick cluster fell over his eyebrow. Under all this glitter the dark onyx eyes looked out, and they were full of pride and of the loneliness of childhood.

Tarvin obediently took his seat in the barouche. He was beginning to wonder whether he should ever wonder at anything again.

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‘We will drive beyond the race-course on the railway road,’ said the child. ‘Who are you?’ he asked, softly laying his hand on Tarvin’s wrist.

‘Just a man, sonny.’

The face looked very old under the turban, for those born to absolute power, or those who have never known a thwarted desire, and reared under the fiercest sun in the world, age even more swiftly than the other children of the East, who are self-possessed men when they should be bashful babes.

‘They say you come here to see things.’

‘That’s true,’ said Tarvin.

‘When I’m king I shall allow nobody to come here—not even the Viceroy.’

‘That leaves me out,’ remarked Tarvin, laughing.

‘You shall come,’ returned the child, measuredly, ‘if you make me laugh. Make me laugh now.’

‘Shall I, little fellow? Well—there was once—I wonder what would make a child laugh in this country. I’ve never seen one do it yet. W-h-e-w!’ Tarvin gave a low, long-drawn whistle. ‘What’s that over there, my boy?’

A little puff of dust rose very far down the road. It was made by swiftly moving wheels, consequently it had nothing to do with the regular traffic of the State.

‘That is what I came out to see,’ said the Maharaj Kunwar. ‘She will make me well. My father, the Maharajah, said so. I am not well now.’ He turned imperiously to a favourite groom at the back of the carriage. ‘Soor Singh’—he spoke in the vernacular—‘what is it when I become without sense? I have forgotten the English.’ The groom leaned forward.

‘Heaven-born, I do not remember,’ he said.

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'Now I remember,' said the child suddenly. 'Mrs. Estes says it is fits. What are fits?'

Tarvin put his hand tenderly on the child's shoulder, but his eyes were following the dust-cloud. 'Let us hope she'll cure them, anyway, young 'un, whatever they are. But who is she?'

'I do not know the name, but she will make me well. See! My father has sent a carriage to meet her.'

An empty barouche was drawn up by the side of the road as the rickety, straining mail-cart drew nearer, with frantic blasts upon a battered key-bugle.

'It's better than a bullock-cart anyway,' said Tarvin to himself, standing up in the carriage, for he was beginning to choke.

'Young man, don't you know who she is?' he asked huskily again.

'She was sent,' said the Maharaj Kunwar.

'Her name's Kate,' said Tarvin in his throat, 'and don't you forget it.' Then to himself in a contented whisper, 'Kate!'

The child waved his hand to his escort, who, dividing, lined either side of the road, with all the ragged bravery of irregular cavalry. The mail-carriage halted, and Kate, crumpled, dusty, dishevelled from her long journey, and red-eyed from lack of sleep, drew back the shutters of the palanquin-like carriage, and stepped dazed into the road. Her numbed limbs would have doubled under her, but Tarvin, leaping from the barouche, caught her to him, regardless of the escort and of the calm-eyed child in the golden drapery, who was shouting, 'Kate! Kate!'

'Run along home, bub,' said Tarvin. 'Well, Kate?'

But Kate had only her tears for him and a gasping 'You! You! You!'

IX

We meet in an evil land,
That is near to the gates of Hell—
I wait for thy command,
To serve, to speed, or withstand;
And thou sayest I do not well!

Oh, love, the flowers so red
Be only blossoms of flame,
The earth is full of the dead,
The new-killed, restless dead,
There is danger beneath and overhead;
And I guard at thy gates in fear
 Of peril and jeopardy,
Of words thou canst not hear,
 Of signs thou canst not see—
And thou sayest 't is ill that I came?
 ‘In Shadowland.’

TEARS stood again in Kate's eyes as she uncoiled her hair before the mirror in the room Mrs. Estes had prepared against her coming—tears of vexation. It was an old story with her that the world wants nothing done for it, and visits with displeasure those who must prod up its lazy content. But in landing at Bombay she had supposed herself at the end of outside

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hindrances and obstacles; what was now to come would belong to the wholesome difficulties of real work. And here was Nick!

She had made the journey from Topaz in a long mood of exaltation. She was launched; it made her giddy and happy, like the boy's first taste of the life of men. She was free at last. No one could stop her. Nothing could keep her from the life to which she had promised herself. A little moment and she might stretch forth her hand and lay it fast upon her work. A few days and she should stoop eye to eye above the pain that had called to her across seas. In her dreams piteous hands of women were raised in prayer to her, and moist, sick palms were laid in hers. The steady urge of the ship was too slow for her; she counted the throbs of the screw. Standing far in the prow, with wind-blown hair, straining her eyes toward India, her spirit went longingly forth toward those to whom she was going; and her life seemed to release itself from her, and sped far, far over the waves, until it reached them and gave itself to them. For a moment, as she set foot on land, she trembled with a revulsion of feeling. She drew near her work; but was it for her? This old fear, which had gone doubtfully with her purpose from the beginning, she put behind her with a stern refusal to question there. She was for so much of her work as heaven would let her do; and she went forward with a new, strong, humble impulse of devotion filling and uplifting her.

It was in this mood that she stepped out of the coach at Rhatore into Tarvin's arms.

She did justice to the kindness that had brought him over all these leagues, but she heartily wished that he had not come. The existence of a man who loved her,

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and for whom she could do nothing, was a sad and troubling fact enough fourteen thousand miles away. Face to face with it, alone in India, it enlarged itself unbearably, and thrust itself between her and all her hopes of bringing serious help to others. Love literally did not seem to her the most important thing in the world at that moment, and something else did; but that didn't make Nick's trouble unimportant, or prevent it, while she braided her hair, from getting in the way of her thoughts. On the morrow she was to enter upon the life which she meant should be a help to those whom it could reach, and here she was thinking of Nicholas Tarvin.

It was because she foresaw that she would keep on thinking of him that she wished him away. He was the tourist wandering about behind the devotee in the cathedral at prayers; he was the other thought. In his person he represented and symbolised the life she had left behind; much worse, he represented a pain she could not heal. It was not with the haunting figure of love attendant that one carried out large purposes. Nor was it with a divided mind that men conquered cities. The intent with which she was aflame needed all of her. She could not divide herself even with Nick. And yet it was good of him to come, and like him. She knew that he had not come merely in pursuit of a selfish hope; it was as he had said—he couldn't sleep nights, knowing what might befall her. That was really good of him.

Mrs. Estes had invited Tarvin to breakfast the day before, when Kate was not expected, but Tarvin was not the man to decline an invitation at the last moment on that account, and he faced Kate across the breakfast-table next morning with a smile which evoked an unwilling smile from her. In spite of a sleepless night she was

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looking very fresh and pretty in the white muslin frock which had replaced her travelling dress, and when he found himself alone with her after breakfast on the veranda (Mrs. Estes having gone to look after the morning affairs of a housekeeper, and Estes having betaken himself to his mission-school, inside the city walls), he began to make her his compliments upon the cool white, unknown to the West. But Kate stopped him.

'Nick,' she said, facing him, 'will you do something for me?'

Seeing her much in earnest, Tarvin attempted the parry humorous; but she broke in—

'No; it is something I want very much, Nick. Will you do it for me?'

'Is there anything I wouldn't do for you?' he asked seriously.

'I don't know; this, perhaps. But you must do it.'

'What is it?'

'Go away.'

He shook his head.

'But you must.'

'Listen, Kate,' said Tarvin, thrusting his hands deep into the big pockets of his white coat; 'I can't. You don't know the place you've come to. Ask me the same question a week hence. I won't agree to go. But I'll agree to talk it over with you then.'

'I know now everything that counts,' she answered. 'I want to do what I've come here for. I shan't be able to do it if you stay. You understand, don't you, Nick? Nothing can change that.'

'Yes, it can. I can. I'll behave.'

'You needn't tell me you'll be kind. I know it. But even you can't be kind enough to help hindering me.'

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Believe that, now, Nick, and go. It isn't that I want you to go, you know.'

'Oh!' observed Tarvin with a smile.

'Well—you know what I mean,' returned Kate, her face unrelaxed.

'Yes; I know. But if I'm good it won't matter. I know that too. You'll see,' he said gently. 'Awful journey, isn't it?'

'You promised me not to take it.'

'I didn't take it,' returned Tarvin, smiling, and spreading a seat for her in the hammock, while he took one of the deep veranda chairs himself. He crossed his legs and fixed the white pith helmet he had lately adopted on his knee. 'I came round the other way on purpose.'

'What do you mean?' asked Kate, dropping tentatively into the hammock.

'San Francisco and Yokohama, of course. You told me not to follow you.'

'Nick!' She gathered into the single syllable the reproof and reproof, the liking and despair, with which the least and the greatest of his audacities alike affected her.

Tarvin had nothing to say for once, and in the pause that fell she had time to reassure herself of her abhorrence of his presence here, and time to still the impulse of pride, which told her that it was good to be followed over half the earth's girdle for love, and the impulse of admiration for that fine devotion—time, above all—for this was worst and most shameful—to scorn the sense of loneliness and far-awayness that came rolling in on her out of the desert like a cloud, and made the protecting and home-like presence of the man she had known in the other life seem for a moment sweet and desirable.

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'Come, Kate, you didn't expect me to stay at home, and let you find your way out here to take the chances of this old sand-heap, did you? It would be a cold day when I let you come to Gokral Seetarun all by your lone, little girl—freezing cold, I've thought since I've been here, and seen what sort of camp it is.'

'Why didn't you tell me you were coming?'

'You didn't seem particularly interested in what I did, when I last saw you.'

'Nick! I didn't want you to come here, and I had to come myself.'

'Well, you've come. I hope you'll like it,' said he, grimly.

'Is it so bad?' she asked. 'Not that I shall mind.'

'Bad! Do you remember Mastodon?'

Mastodon was one of those Western towns which have their future behind them—a city without an inhabitant, abandoned and desolate.

'Take Mastodon for deadness, and fill it with ten Leadvilles for wickedness—Leadville the first year—and you've got a tenth of it.'

He went on to offer her an exposition of the history, politics, and society of Gokral Seetarun, from his own point of view, dealing with the dead East from the standpoint of the living West, and dealing with it vividly. It was a burning theme, and it was a happiness to him to have a listener who could understand his attitude, even if she could not entirely sympathise with it. His tone besought her to laugh at it with him a little, if only a little, and Kate consented to laugh; but she said it all seemed to her more mournful than amusing.

Tarvin could agree to this readily enough, but he told her that he laughed to avoid weeping. It made him

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tired to see the fixedness, the apathy, and lifelessness of this rich and populous world, which should be up and stirring by rights—trading, organising, inventing, building new towns, making the old ones keep up with the procession, laying new railroads, going in for fresh enterprises, and keeping things humming.

‘They’ve got resources enough,’ he said. ‘It isn’t as if they had the excuse that the country’s poor. It’s a good country. Move the population of a lively Colorado town to Rhatore, set up a good local paper, organise a board of trade, and let the world know what there is here, and we’d have a boom in six months that would shake the empire. But what’s the use? They’re dead. They’re mummies. They’re wooden images. There isn’t enough real, old-fashioned downright rustle and razzle-dazzle and “git up and git” in Gokral Seetarun to run a milk-cart.’

‘Yes, yes,’ she murmured, half to herself, with illumined eyes. ‘It’s for that I’ve come.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Because they are not like us,’ she answered, turning her lustrous face on him. ‘If they were clever, if they were wise, what could we do for them? It is because they are lost, stumbling, foolish creatures that they need us.’ She heaved a deep sigh. ‘It is good to be here.’

‘It’s good to have you,’ said Tarvin.

She started. ‘Don’t say such things any more, please, Nick,’ she said.

‘Oh, well!’ he groaned.

‘But it’s this way, Nick,’ she said earnestly, but kindly. ‘I don’t belong to such things any more—not even to the possibility of them. Think of me as a nun. Think

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of me as having renounced all such happiness, and all other kinds of happiness but my work.'

'H'm. May I smoke?' At her nod he lighted a cigar. I'm glad I'm here for the ceremony.'

'What ceremony?' she asked.

'Seeing you take the veil. But you won't take it.'

'Why not?'

He grumbled inarticulately over his cigar a moment. Then he looked up. 'Because I've got big wealth that says you won't. I know you, I know Rhatore, and I know—'

'What? Who?'

'Myself,' he said, looking up.

She clasped her hands in her lap. 'Nick,' she said, leaning toward him, 'you know I like you. I like you too well to let you go on thinking—you talk of not being able to sleep. How do you suppose I can sleep with the thought always by me that you are laying up a pain and disappointment for yourself—one that I can't help, unless I can help it by begging you to go away now. I do beg it. Please go!'

Tarvin pulled at his cigar musingly for some seconds.

'Dear girl, I'm not afraid.'

She sighed, and turned her face away toward the desert. 'I wish you were', she said hopelessly.

'Fear is not for legislators,' he retorted oracularly.

She turned back to him with a sudden motion. 'Legislators! O Nick, are you—?'

'I'm afraid I am—by a majority of 1518.' He handed her the cable-despatch.

'Poor father!'

'Well, I don't know.'

'Oh! Well, I congratulate you, of course.'

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‘Thanks.’

‘But I’m not sure it will be a good thing for you.’

‘Yes; that’s the way it had struck me. If I spend my whole term out here, like as not my constituents won’t be in a mood to advance my political career when I get back.’

‘All the more reason—’

‘No; the more reason for fixing the real thing first. I can make myself solid in politics any time. But there isn’t but one time to make myself solid with you, Kate. It’s here. It’s now.’ He rose and bent over her. ‘Do you think I can postpone that, dear? I can adjourn it from day to day, and I do cheerfully, and you shan’t hear any more of it until you’re ready to. But you like me, Kate. I know that. And I—well, I like you. There isn’t but one end to that sort of thing.’ He took her hand. ‘Good-bye. I’ll come and take you for a look at the city to-morrow.’

Kate gazed long after his retreating figure, and then took herself into the house, where a warm, healthful chat with Mrs. Estes, chiefly about the children at Bangor, helped her to a sane view of the situation she must face with the reappearance of Tarvin. She saw that he meant to stay, and if she didn’t mean to go, it was for her to find the brave way of adjusting the fact to her hopes. His perversity complicated an undertaking which she had never expected to find simple in itself; and it was finally only because she trusted all that he said implicitly that she was able to stay herself upon his promise to ‘behave.’ Liberally interpreted, this really meant much from Tarvin; perhaps it meant all that she need ask.

When all was said, there remained the impulse to flight; but she was ashamed to find, when he came in the morn-

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ing, that a formidable pang of home-sickness drew her toward him, and made his definite and cheerful presence a welcome sight. Mrs. Estes had been kind. The two women had made friends, and found each other's heart with instant sympathy. But a home face was different, and perhaps Nick's was even more different. At all events, she willingly let him carry out his plan of showing her the city.

In their walk about it Tarvin did not spare her the advantage of his ten days' residence in Rhatore preceding her coming; he made himself her guide, and stood on rocks overlooking things and spouted his second-hand history with an assurance that the oldest Political Resident might have envied. He was interested in the problems of the State, if not responsible for their solution. Was he not a member of a governing body? His ceaseless and fruitful curiosity about all new things had furnished him, in ten days, with much learning about Rhatore and Gokral Seetarun, enabling him to show to Kate, with eyes scarcely less fresh than her own, the wonders of the narrow sand-choked streets, where the footfalls of camels and men alike fell dead. They lingered by the royal menagerie of starved tigers, and the cages of the two tame hunting leopards, hooded like hawks, that slept, and yawned, and scratched on their two bedsteads by the main gate of the city; and he showed her the ponderous door of the great gate itself, studded with foot-long spikes against the attacks of that living battering-ram, the elephant. He led her through the long lines of dark shops planted in and among the ruins of palaces, whose builders had been long since forgotten, and about the straggling barracks, past knots of fantastically attired soldiers, who hung their day's marketing from the

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muzzle of the Brown Bess or flint-lock; and then he showed her the mausoleum of the kings of Gokral Seetarun under the shadow of the great temple where the children of the Sun and Moon went to worship, and where the smooth, black stone bull glared across the main square at the cheap bronze statue of Colonel Nolan's predecessor—an offensively energetic and very plain Yorkshireman. Lastly, they found beyond the walls the clamouring caravansarai of traders by the Gateway of the Three Gods, whence the caravans of camels filed out with their burdens of glistening rock-salt for the railroad, and where by day and by night cloaked and jaw-bound riders of the desert, speaking a tongue that none could understand, rode in from God knows what fastness beyond the white hillocks of Jeysulmir.

As they went along, Tarvin asked her about Topaz. How had she left it? How was the dear old town looking? Kate said she had only left it three days after his departure.

'Three days! Three days is a long time in the life of a growing town.'

Kate smiled. 'I didn't see any changes,' she said.

'No? Peters was talking about breaking ground for his new brick saloon on G Street the day after I left; Parsons was getting in a new dynamo for the city's electric light plant; they were just getting to work on the grading of Massachusetts Avenue, and they had planted the first tree in my twenty-acre plot. Kearney, the druggist, was putting in a plate-glass window, and I shouldn't wonder if Maxim had got his new post-office boxes from Meriden before you left. Didn't you notice?'

Kate shook her head. 'I was thinking of something else just then.'

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'Pshaw! I'd like to know. But no matter. I suppose it is asking too much to expect a woman to play her own hand, and keep the run of improvements in the town,' he mused. 'Women aren't built that way. And yet I used to run a political canvass and a business or two, and something else in that town.' He glanced humorously at Kate, who lifted a warning hand. 'Forbidden subject? All right. I will be good. But they had to get up early in the morning to do anything to it without letting me into it. What did your father and mother say at the last?'

'Don't speak of that,' begged Kate.

'Well, I won't.'

'I wake up at night, and think of mother. It's dreadful. At the last I suppose I should have stayed behind and shirked if some one had said the right word—or the wrong one—as I got on board the train, and waved my handkerchief to them.'

'Good heaven! Why didn't I stay!' he groaned.

'You couldn't have said it, Nick,' she told him quietly.

'You mean your father could. Of course he could, and if he had happened to be some one else he would. When I think of that I want to—!'

'Don't say anything against father, please,' she said, with a tightening of the lips.

'Oh, dear child!' he murmured contritely, 'I didn't mean that. But I have to say something against somebody. Give me somebody to curse, and I'll be quiet.'

'Nick!'

'Well, I'm not a block of wood,' he growled.

'No; you are only a very foolish man.'

Tarvin smiled. 'Now you're shouting.'

She asked him about the Maharaj Kunwar, to change the subject, and Tarvin told her that he was a little brick.

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But he added that the society of Rhatore wasn't all as good.

'You ought to see Sitalhai!'

He went on to tell her about the Maharajah and the people of the palace with whom she would come in contact. They talked of the strange mingling of impassiveness and childishness in the people, which had already impressed Kate, and spoke of their primitive passions and simple ideas—simple as the massive strength of the Orient is simple.

'They aren't what we should call cultured. They don't know Ibsen a little bit, and they don't go in for Tolstoi for sour apples,' said Tarvin, who did not read three newspapers a day at Topaz for nothing. 'If they really knew the modern young woman, I suppose her life wouldn't be worth an hour's purchase. But they've got some rattling good old-fashioned ideas, all the same—the sort I used to hear once upon a time at my dear old mother's knee, away back in the State of Maine. Mother believed in marriage, you know; and that's where she agreed with me and with the fine old-style natives of India. The venerable, ramshackle, tumble-down institution of matrimony is still in use here, you know.'

'But I never said I sympathised with Nora, Nick,' exclaimed Kate, leaping all the chasms of connection.

'Well, then, that's where you are solid with the Indian Empire. The "Doll's House" glanced right off this blessed old-timey country. You wouldn't know where it had been hit.'

'But I don't agree with all your ideas either,' she felt bound to add.

'I can think of one,' retorted Tarvin, with a shrewd smile. 'But I'll convert you to my views there.'

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Kate stopped short in the street along which they were walking. ‘I trusted you, Nick!’ she said reproachfully.

He stopped, and gazed ruefully at her for a moment. ‘O Lord!’ he groaned. ‘I trusted myself! But I’m always thinking of it. What can you expect? But I tell you what, Kate, this shall be the end—last, final, ultimate. I’m done. From this out I’m a reformed man. I don’t promise not to think, and I’ll have to go on feeling, just the same. But I’ll be quiet. Shake on it.’ He offered his hand, and Kate took it.

They walked on for some moments in silence until Tarvin said mournfully, ‘You didn’t see Heckler just before you came away, did you?’

She shook her head.

‘No; Jim and you never did get along much together. But I wish I knew what he’s thinking about me. Didn’t hear any rumour, any report, going around about what had become of me, I suppose?’

‘They thought in town that you had gone to San Francisco to see some of the Western directors of the Colorado and California Central, I think. They thought that because the conductor of your train brought back word that you said you were going to Alaska, and they didn’t believe that. I wish you had a better reputation for truth-telling at Topaz, Nick.’

‘So do I, Kate; so do I,’ exclaimed Tarvin heartily. ‘But if I had, how would I ever get the right thing believed? That’s just what I wanted them to think—that I was looking after their interests. But where would I be if I had sent that story back? They would have had me working a land-grab in Chili before night. That reminds me—don’t mention that I’m here in writing home, please. Perhaps they’ll figure that out, too, by

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the rule of contraries, if I give them the chance. But I don't want to give them the chance.'

'I'm not likely to mention it,' said Kate flushing.

A moment later she recurred to the subject of her mother. In the yearning for home that came upon her anew in the midst of all the strangeness through which Tarvin was taking her, the thought of her mother, patient, alone, looking for some word from her, hurt her as if for the first time. The memory was for the moment intolerable to her; but when Tarvin asked her why she had come at all if she felt that way, she answered with the courage of better moments—'Why do men go to war?'

Kate saw little of Tarvin during the next few days. Mrs. Estes made her known at the palace, and she had plenty to occupy her mind and heart. There she stepped bewilderedly into a land where it was always twilight—a labyrinth of passages, courtyards, stairs, and hidden ways, all overflowing with veiled women, who peered at her and laughed behind her back, or childishly examined her dress, her helmet, and her gloves. It seemed impossible that she should ever know the smallest part of the vast warren, or distinguish one pale face from another in the gloom, as the women led her through long lines of lonely chambers where the wind sighed alone under the glittering ceilings, to hanging gardens two hundred feet above the level of the ground, but still jealously guarded by high walls, and down again by interminable stairways, from the glare and the blue of the flat roofs to silent subterranean chambers hewn against the heat of the summer sixty feet into the heart of the living rock. At every step she found women and children, and yet more women and children. The palace was reported to hold within

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its walls four thousand living, and no man knew how many buried, dead.

There were many women—how many she did not know—worked upon by intrigues she could not comprehend, who refused her ministrations absolutely. They were not ill, they said, and the touch of the white woman meant pollution. Others there were who thrust their children before her and bade her bring colour and strength back to these pale buds born in the darkness; and terrible, fierce-eyed girls who leaped upon her out of the dark, overwhelming her with passionate complaints that she did not and dared not understand. Monstrous and obscene pictures glared at her from the walls of the little rooms, and the images of shameless gods mocked her from their greasy niches above the doorways. The heat and the smell of cooking, faint fumes of incense, and the indescribable taint of overcrowded humanity, caught her by the throat. But what she heard and what she guessed sickened her more than any visible horror. Plainly it was one thing to be stirred to generous action by a vivid recital of the state of the women of India, another to face the unutterable fact in the isolation of the women's apartments of the palace of Rhatore.

Tarvin meanwhile was going about spying out the land on a system which he had contrived for himself. It was conducted on the principle of exhaustion of the possibilities in the order of their importance—every movement which he made having the directest, though not always the most obvious, relation to the Naulahka.

He was free to come and go through the royal gardens, where innumerable and very seldom paid gardeners fought with water-skin and well-wheel against the de-

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stroying heat of the desert. He was welcomed in the Maharajah's stables, where eight hundred horses were littered down nightly, and was allowed to watch them go out for their morning exercise, four hundred at a time, in a whirlwind of dust. In the outer courts of the palace it was open to him to come and go as he chose—to watch the toilets of the elephants when the Maharajah went out in state, to laugh with the quarter-guard, and to unearth dragon-headed, snake-throated pieces of artillery, invented by native artificers, who, here in the East, had dreamed of the mitrailleuse. But Kate could go where he was forbidden to venture. He knew the life of a white woman to be as safe in Rhatore as in Topaz; but on the first day she disappeared, untroubled and unquestioning, behind the darkness of the veiled door leading to the apartments of the women of the palace, he found his hand going instinctively to the butt of his revolver.

The Maharajah was an excellent friend, and no bad hand at pachisi; but as Tarvin sat opposite him, half an hour later, he reflected that he should not recommend the Maharajah's life for insurance if anything happened to his love while she remained in those mysterious chambers from which the only sign that came to the outer world was a ceaseless whispering and rustling. When Kate came out, the little Maharaj Kunwar clinging to her hand, her face was white and drawn, and her eyes full of indignant tears. She had seen.

Tarvin hastened to her side, but she put him from her with the imperious gesture that women know in deep moments, and fled to Mrs. Estes.

Tarvin felt himself for the moment rudely thrust out of her life. The Maharaj Kunwar found him that evening pacing up and down the veranda of the rest-house,

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almost sorry that he had not shot the Maharajah for bringing that look into Kate's eyes. With deep-drawn breath he thanked his God that he was there to watch and defend, and, if need were, to carry off, at the last, by force. With a shudder he fancied her here alone, save for the distant care of Mrs. Estes.

'I have brought this for Kate,' said the child, descending from his carriage cautiously, with a parcel that filled both his arms. 'Come with me there.'

Nothing loth, Tarvin came, and they drove over to the house of the missionary.

'All the people in my palace,' said the child as they went, 'say that she's your Kate.'

'I'm glad they know that much,' muttered Tarvin to himself savagely. 'What's this you have got for her?' he asked the Maharaj aloud, laying his hand on the parcel.

'It is from my mother, the Queen—the real Queen, you know, because I am the Prince. There is a message, too, that I must not tell.' He began to whisper, child-like, to himself, to keep the message in mind. Kate was in the veranda when they arrived, and her face brightened a little at sight of the child.

'Tell my guard to stand back out of the garden. Go, and wait in the road.'

The carriage and troopers withdrew. The child, still holding Tarvin's hand, held out the parcel to Kate.

'It is from my mother,' he said. 'You have seen her. This man need not go. He is'—he hesitated a little—'of your heart, is he not? Your speech is his speech.'

Kate flushed, but did not attempt to set the child right. What could she say?

'And I am to tell this,' he continued, 'first before

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everything, till you quite understand.' He spoke hesitatingly, translating out of his own vernacular as he went on, and drawing himself to his full height, as he cleared the cluster of emeralds from his brow. 'My mother, the Queen—the real Queen—says, "I was three months at this work. It is for you, because I have seen your face. That which has been made may be unravelled against our will, and a gipsy's hands are always picking. For the love of the gods look to it that a gipsy unravels nothing that I have made, for it is my life and soul to me. Protect this work of mine that comes from me—a cloth nine years upon the loom." I know more English than my mother,' said the child, dropping into his ordinary speech.

Kate opened the parcel, and unrolled a crude yellow and black comforter, with a violent crimson fringe, clumsily knitted. With such labours the queens of Gokral Seetarun were wont to beguile their leisure.

'That is all,' said the child. But he seemed unwilling to go. There was a lump in Kate's throat, as she handled the pitiful gift. Without warning, the child, never loosening for a moment his grip on Tarvin's hand, began to repeat the message word by word, his little fingers tightening on Tarvin's fist as he went on.

'Say I am very grateful indeed,' said Kate, a little puzzled, and not too sure of her voice.

'That was not the answer,' said the child; and he looked appealingly at his tall friend, the new Englishman.

The idle talk of the commercial travellers in the veranda of the rest-house flashed through Tarvin's mind. He took a quick pace forward, and laid his hand on Kate's shoulder, whispering huskily—

'Can't you see what it means? It's the boy—the cloth nine years on the loom.'

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‘But what can I do?’ cried Kate, bewildered.

‘Look after him. Keep on looking after him. You are quick enough in most things. Sitabhai wants his life. See that she doesn’t get it.’

Kate began to understand a little. Everything was possible in that awful palace, even child-murder. She had already guessed the hate that lives between childless and mother queens. The Maharaj Kunwar stood motionless in the twilight, twinkling in his jewelled robes.

‘Shall I say it again?’ he asked.

‘No, no, no, child! No!’ she cried, flinging herself on her knees before him, and snatching his little figure to her breast, with a sudden access of tenderness and pity. ‘O Nick! what shall we do in this horrible country?’ She began to cry.

‘Ah!’ said the Maharaj, utterly unmoved, ‘I was to go when I saw that you cried.’ He lifted up his voice for the carriage and troopers, and departed, leaving the shabby comforter on the floor.

Kate was sobbing in the half darkness. Neither Mrs. Estes nor her husband was within just then. That little ‘we’ of hers went through Tarvin with a sweet and tingling ecstasy. He stooped and took her in his arms, and for that which followed Kate did not rebuke him.

‘We’ll pull through together, little girl,’ he whispered to the shaken head on his shoulder.

X

Ye know the Hundred Danger Time when gay with pain
and flowers,
Your household gods are bribed to help the bitter, help-
less hours;
Ye know the worn and rotten mat whereon your daugh-
ter lies,
Ye know the sootak-room unclean, the cell wherein she
dies.

Dies with the babble in her ear of midwife's muttered
charm,
Dies, spite young life that strains to stay, the suckling
on her arm—
Dies in the four-fold heated room, parched by the Birth-
Fire's breath—
Foredoomed, ye say, lest anguish lack, to haunt her
home in death!

'A Song of the Women.'

'D EAR FRIEND—That was very unkind of you,
and you have made my life harder. I know I
was weak. The child upset me. But I must
do what I came for, and I want you to strengthen me,
Nick, not hinder me. Don't come for a few days, please.
I need all I am or hope to be for the work I see opening
here. I think I can really do some good. Let me,
please.
Kate.'

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Tarvin read fifty different meanings into this letter, received the following morning, and read them out again. At the end of his conjectures he could be sure only of one thing—that in spite of that moment's weakness, Kate was fixed upon her path. He could not yet prevail against her steadfast gentleness, and perhaps it would be better not to try. Talks in the veranda, and sentinel-like prowlings about her path when she went to the palace, were pleasant enough, but he had not come to Rhatore to tell her that he loved her. Topaz, in whose future the other half of his heart was bound up, knew that secret long ago, and—Topaz was waiting for the coming of the Three C.'s, even as Nick was waiting on Kate's comings and goings. The girl was unhappy, overstrained, and despairing, but since—he thanked God always—he was at hand to guard her from the absolute shock of evil fate, she might well be left for the moment to Mrs. Estes' comfort and sympathy.

She had already accomplished something in the guarded courts of the women's quarters, for the Maharaj Kunwar's mother had entrusted her only son's life to her care (who could help loving and trusting Kate?); but for his own part, what had he done for Topaz beyond—he looked toward the city—playing pachisi with the Maharajah? The low morning sun flung the shadow of the rest-house before him. The commercial travellers came out one by one, gazed at the walled bulk of Rhatore, and cursed it. Tarvin mounted his horse, of which much more hereafter, and ambled toward the city to pay his respects to the Maharajah. It was through him, if through any one, that he must possess himself of the Naulahka; he had been anxiously studying him, and shrewdly measuring the situation, and he now believed that he had formed

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a plan through which he might hope to make himself solid with the Maharajah—a plan which, whether it brought him the Naulahka or not, would at least allow him the privilege of staying at Rhatore. This privilege certain broad hints of Colonel Nolan's had seemed to Tarvin of late plainly to threaten, and it had become clear to him that he must at once acquire a practical and publishable object for his visit, if he had to rip up the entire State to find it. To stay, he must do something in particular. What he had found to do was particular enough; it should be done forthwith, and it should bring him first the Naulahka, and then—if he was at all the man he took himself for—Kate!

As he approached the gates he saw Kate, in a brown habit, riding with Mrs. Estes out of the missionary's garden.

'You needn't be afraid, dear. I shan't bother you,' he said to himself, smiling at the dust-cloud rising behind her, as he slackened his pace. 'But I wonder what's taking you out so early.'

The misery within the palace walls which had sent her half weeping to Mrs. Estes represented only a phase of the work for which Kate had come. If the wretchedness was so great under the shadow of the throne, what must the common folk endure? Kate was on her way to the hospital.

'There is only one native doctor at the hospital,' Mrs. Estes was saying, as they went along, 'and, of course, he's only a native; that is to say, he is idle.'

'How can any one be idle here?' her companion cried, as the stored heat from under the city gates beat across their temples.

'Every one grows idle so soon in Rhatore,' returned Mrs. Estes, with a little sigh, thinking of Lucien's high

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hopes and strenuous endeavours, long since subdued to a mild apathy.

Kate sat her horse with the assured seat of a Western girl who has learned to ride and to walk at the same time. Her well-borne little figure had advantages on horseback. The glow of resolve lighting her simply framed face at the moment lent it a spiritual beauty; and she was warmed by the consciousness that she drew near her purpose and the goal of two years' working and dreaming. As they rounded a curve in the main street of the city, a crowd was seen waiting at the foot of a flight of red sandstone steps rising to the platform of a white-washed house three stories in height, on which appeared the sign, 'State Dispensary.' The letters leaned against one another, and drooped down over each side of the door.

A sense of the unreality of it all came over Kate as she surveyed the crowd of women, clad in vermillion, dull-red, indigo, saffron, blue, pink, and turquoise garments of raw silk. Almost every woman held a child on her hip, and a low wailing cry rose up as Kate drew rein. The women clustered about her stirrup, caught at her foot, and thrust their babies into her arms. She took one little one to her breast, and hushed it tenderly; it was burnt and dry with fever.

'Be careful,' said Mrs. Estes; 'there is smallpox in the hills behind us, and these people have no notion of precautions.'

Kate, listening to the cry of the women, did not answer. A portly, white-bearded native, in a brown camel's-hair dressing-gown and patent-leather boots, came out of the dispensary, thrusting the women right and left, and bowing profoundly.

'You are new lady doctor?' he said. 'Hospital is quite ready for inspection. Stand back from the Miss sahib!'

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he shouted in the vernacular, as Kate slipped to the ground, and the crowd closed about her. Mrs. Estes remained in the saddle, watching the scene.

A woman of the desert, very tall, gold-coloured, and scarlet-lipped, threw back her face-cloth, caught Kate by the wrist, and made as if she would drag her away, crying aloud fiercely in the vernacular. The trouble in her eyes was not to be denied. Kate followed unresisting, and, as the crowd parted, saw a camel kneeling in the roadway. On its back a gaunt skeleton of a man was muttering, and picking aimlessly at the nail-studded saddle. The woman drew herself up to full height, and, without a word, flung herself down upon the ground, clasping Kate's feet. Kate stooped to raise her, her under lip quivering, and the doctor from the steps shouted cheerfully—

'Oh, that is all right. He is confirmed lunatic, her husband. She is always bringing him here.'

'Have you done nothing, then?' cried Kate, turning on him angrily.

'What can do? She will not leave him here for treatment so I may blister him.'

'Blister him!' murmured Kate to herself, appalled, as she caught the woman's hands and held them firmly. 'Tell her that I say he must be left here,' she said aloud. The doctor conveyed the command. The woman took a deep breath, and stared at Kate under level brows for a full half-minute. Then she carried Kate's hand to the man's forehead, and sat down in the dust, veiling her head.

Kate, dumb under these strange expressions of the workings of the Eastern mind, stared at her for a moment, with an impulse of the compassion which knows no race, before she bent and kissed her quietly on the forehead.

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'Carry this man up,' she said, pointing; and he was carried up the steps and into the hospital, his wife following like a dog. Once she turned and spoke to her sisters below, and there went up a little chorus of weeping and laughter.

'She says,' said the doctor, beaming, 'that she will kill any one who is impolite to you. Also, she will be the nurse of your son.'

Kate paused to say a word to Mrs. Estes, who was bound on an errand further into the city; then she mounted the steps with the doctor.

'Now, will you see the hospital?' he asked. 'But first let me introduce. I am Lalla Dhunpat Rai, Licentiate Medicine, from the Duff College. I was first native my province that took that degree. That was twenty years ago.'

Kate looked at him wonderingly. 'Where have you been since?' she asked.

'Some time I stayed in my father's house. Then I was clerk in medical stores in British India. But his Highness have graciously given me this appointment, which I hold now.'

Kate lifted her eyebrows. This, then, was to be her colleague. They passed into the hospital together in silence, Kate holding the skirt of her riding-habit clear of the accumulated grime of the floor.

Six roughly made pallets, laced with hide and string, stood in the filthy central courtyard of the house, and on each cot a man, swathed in a white sheet, tossed and moaned and jabbered. A woman entered with a pot full of rancid native sweetmeats, and tried vainly to make one of the men eat of her delicacies. In the full glare of the sunlight stood a young man almost absolutely

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unclothed, his hands clasped behind his head, trying to outstare the sun. He began a chant, broke off, and hurried from bed to bed, shouting to each words that Kate could not understand. Then he returned to his place in the centre, and took up his interrupted song.

'He is confirmed lunatic, also,' said the doctor. 'I have blistered and cupped him very severely, but he will not go away. He is quite harmless, except when he does not get his opium.'

'Surely you don't allow the patients opium!' exclaimed Kate.

'Of course I allow opium. Otherwise they would die. All Rajputs eat opium.'

'And you?' asked Kate, with horror.

'Once I did not—when I first came. But now—' He drew a smooth-worn tin tobacco-box from his waist, and took from it what appeared to Kate a handful of opium pills.

Despair was going over her in successive waves. 'Show me the women's ward,' she said wearily.

'Oh, they are all upstairs and downstairs and round-about,' returned the doctor casually.

'And the maternity cases?' she asked.

'They are in casual ward.'

'Who attends to them?'

'They do not like me; but there is very clever woman from the outside—she comes in.'

'Has she any training—any education?'

'She is much esteemed in her own village,' said the doctor. 'She is here now, if you wish to see.'

'Where?' demanded Kate.

Dhunpat Rai, somewhat uneasy in his mind, made haste to lead the way up a narrow staircase to a closed door, from behind which came the wail of a new life.

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Kate flung the door open wrathfully. In that particular ward of the State Hospital were the clay and cow-dung images of two gods, which the woman in charge was besprinkling with marigold buds. Every window, every orifice that might admit a breath of air, was closed, and the birth-fire blazed fiercely in one corner, its fumes nearly asphyxiating Kate as she entered.

What happened between Kate and the much-esteemed woman will never be known. The girl did not emerge for half an hour. But the woman came out much sooner dishevelled, and cackling feebly.

After this Kate was prepared for anything, even for the neglected condition of the drugs in the dispensary—the mortar was never cleaned, and every prescription carried to the patient many more drugs than were written for him—and for the foul, undrained, uncleaned, unlighted, and unventilated rooms which she entered one after another hopelessly. The patients were allowed to receive their friends as they would, and to take from their hands whatever misguided kindness offered. When death came, the mourners howled in chorus about the cot, and bore the naked body through the courtyard, amid the jeers of the lunatic, to carry to the city what infection Heaven willed.

There was no isolation of infectious cases during the progress of the disease, and children scourged with ophthalmia played light-heartedly with the children of the visitors or among diphtheria beds. At one point, and one point only, the doctor was strong; he was highly successful in dealing with the very common trouble entered on the day-book as ‘loin bite.’ The woodcutters and small traders who had occasion to travel through the lonely roads of the State were not infrequently struck

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down by tigers, and in these cases the doctor, discarding the entire English pharmacopœia, fell back on simples of proved repute in the neighbouring villages, and wrought wonders. None the less, it was necessary to convey to him that in future there would be only one head of the State Hospital, that her orders must be obeyed without question, and that her name was Miss Kate Sheriff.

The doctor, reflecting that she attended on the women of the Court, offered no protest. He had been through many such periods of reform and reorganisation, and knew that his own inertia and a smooth tongue would carry him through many more. He bowed and assented, allowing Kate's reproaches to pass over his head, and parrying all questions with the statement—

'This hospital only allowed one hundred and fifty rupees per mensem from State revenues. How can get drugs all the way from Calcutta for such sum?'

'I am paying for this order,' said Kate, writing out a list of needed drugs and appliances on the desk in the bath-room, which was supposed to serve as an office; 'and I shall pay for whatever else I think necessary.'

'Order going through me officially?' suggested Dhunpat Rai, with his head on one side.

Unwilling to raise unnecessary obstacles, Kate assented. With those poor creatures lying in the rooms about her unwatched, untended, at the mercy of this creature, it was not a time to argue about commissions.

'Yes,' she said decidedly; 'of course. And the doctor, when he saw the size and scope of the order, felt that he could endure much at her hands.'

At the end of the three hours Kate came away, fainting with weariness, want of food, and bitter heartache.

XI

Who speaks to the King carries his life in his hand.
Native Proverb.

TARVIN found the Maharajah, who had not yet taken his morning allowance of opium, sunk in the deepest depression. The man from Topaz gazed at him shrewdly, filled with his purpose.

The Maharajah's first words helped him to declare it. 'What have you come here for?' he asked.

'To Rhatore?' inquired Tarvin, with a smile that embraced the whole horizon.

'Yes; to Rhatore,' grunted the Maharajah. 'The Agent Sahib says you do not belong to any government, and that you have come here only to see things and write lies about them. Why have you come?'

'I have come to turn your river. There is gold in it,' he said steadily.

The Rajah answered him with brevity. 'Go and speak to the Government,' he said sulkily.

'It's your river, I guess,' returned Tarvin cheerfully.

'Mine! Nothing in the State is mine. The shop-keeper people are at my gates day and night. The Agent Sahib won't let me collect taxes as my fathers used to do. I have no Army.'

'That's perfectly true,' assented Tarvin, under his breath. 'I'll run off with it some morning.'

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'And if I had,' continued the Maharajah, 'I have no one to fight against. I am only an old wolf, with all my teeth drawn. Go away!'

They were talking in the flagged courtyard immediately outside that wing of the palace occupied by Sitabhai. The Maharajah was sitting in a broken Windsor chair, while his grooms brought up successive files of horses, saddled and bridled, in the hope that one of the animals might be chosen for his Majesty's ride. The stale, sick air of the palace drifted across the marble flags before the morning wind, and it was not a wholesome smell.

Tarvin, who had drawn rein in the courtyard without dismounting, flung his right leg over the pony's withers, and held his peace. He had seen something of the effect of opium upon the Maharajah. A servant was approaching with a small brass bowl full of opium and water. The Maharajah swallowed the draught with many wry faces, dashed the last brown drops from his moustache and beard, and dropped back into the chair, staring with vacant eyes. In a few minutes he sprang to his feet, erect and smiling.

'Are you here, Sahib?' said he. 'You are here, or I should not feel ready to laugh. Do you go riding this morning?'

'I'm your man.'

'Then we will bring out the Foxhall colt. He will throw you.'

'Very good,' said Tarvin leisurely.

'And I will ride my own Cutch mare. Let us get away before the Agent Sahib comes,' said the Maharajah.

The blast of a bugle was heard without the courtyard, and a clatter of wheels, as the grooms departed to saddle the horses.

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The Maharaj Kunwar ran up the steps and pattered toward the Maharajah, his father, who picked him up in his lap, and fondled him.

'What brings thee here, Lalji?' asked the Maharajah. Lalji, the Beloved, was the familiar name by which the Prince was known within the palace.

'I came to exercise my Guard. Father, they are giving me bad saddlery for my troopers from the State arsenal. Jeysingh's saddle-peak is mended with string, and Jeysingh is the best of my soldiers. Moreover, he tells me nice tales,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, speaking in the vernacular, with a friendly little nod toward Tarvin.

'Hai! Hai! Thou art like all the rest,' said the King. 'Always some fresh demand upon the State. And what is it now?'

The child joined his little hands together, and caught his father fearlessly by his monstrous beard, which, in the manner of a Rajput, was brushed up over his ears. 'Only ten little new saddles,' said the child. 'They are in the big saddle-rooms. I have seen them. But the Keeper of the Horses said that I was first to ask the King.'

The Maharajah's face darkened, and he swore a great oath by his gods.

'The King is a slave and a servant,' he growled—'the servant of the Agent Sahib and this woman-talking English Raj; but, by Indur! the King's son is at least a King's son. What right had Saroop Singh to stay thee from anything that thou desiredst, Prince?'

'I told him,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, 'that my father would not be pleased. But I said no more, because I was not very well, and thou knowest'—the boy's

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head drooped under the turban—‘I am only a little child. I may have the saddles?’

Tarvin, to whom no word of this conversation was intelligible, sat at ease on his pony, smiling at his friend the Maharaj. The interview had begun in the dead dawn-silence of the courtyard—a silence so intense that he could hear the doves cooing on a tower a hundred and fifty feet above his head. But now all four sides of the green-shuttered courtyard were alive, awake, and intent about him. He could hear muffled breathings, the rustle of draperies, and the faintest possible jarring of shutters, cautiously opened from within. A heavy smell of musk and jasmine came to his nostrils and filled him with uneasiness, for he knew, without turning his head or his eyes, that Sitabhai and her women were watching all that went on. But neither the King nor the Prince heeded. The Maharaj Kunwar was very full of his English lessons, learned at Mrs. Estes’ knee, and the King was as interested as he. Lest Tarvin should fail to understand, the Prince began to speak in English again, but very slowly and distinctly, that his father also might comprehend.

‘And this is a new verse,’ he said, ‘which I learned only yesterday.’

‘Is there any talk of their gods in it?’ asked the Maharajah suspiciously. ‘Remember thou art a Rajput.’

‘No; oh no!’ said the Prince. ‘It is only English, and I learned it very quickly.’

‘Let me hear, little Pundit. Some day thou wilt become a scribe, and go to the English colleges, and wear a long black gown.’

The child slipped quickly back into the vernacular. ‘The flag of our State has five colours,’ he said. ‘When

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I have fought for that, perhaps I will become an Englishman.'

'There is no leading of armies afield any more, little one; but say thy verses.'

The subdued rustle of unseen hundreds grew more intense. Tarvin leaned forward with his chin in his hand, as the Prince slid down from his father's lap, put his hands behind him, and began, without pauses or expression—

'Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Framed thy fearful symmetry?
When thy heart began to beat
What dread hand made thy dread feet?

'There is more that I have forgotten,' he went on, 'but the last line is—

'Did he who made the lamb make thee?

I learned it all very quickly.' And he began to applaud himself with both hands, while Tarvin followed suit.

'I do not understand; but it is good to know English. Thy friend here speaks such English as I never knew,' said the Maharajah in the vernacular.

'Ay,' rejoined the Prince. 'But he speaks with his face and his hands alive—so; and I laugh before I know why. Now Colonel Nolan Sahib speaks like a buffalo, with his mouth shut. I cannot tell whether he is angry or pleased. But, father, what does Tarvin Sahib do here?'

'We go for a ride together,' returned the King. 'When

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we return, perhaps I will tell thee. What do the men about thee say of him?

'They say he is a man of clean heart; and he is always kind to me.'

'Has he said aught to thee of me?'

'Never in language that I could understand. But I do not doubt that he is a good man. See, he is laughing now.'

Tarvin, who had pricked up his ears at hearing his own name, now resettled himself in the saddle, and gathered up his reins, as a hint to the King that it was time to be moving.

The grooms brought up a long, switch-tailed English thoroughbred and a lean, mouse-coloured mare. The Maharajah rose to his feet.

'Go back to Saroop Singh and get the saddles, Prince,' said he.

'What are you going to do to-day, little man?' asked Tarvin.

'I shall go and get new equipment,' answered the child, 'and then I shall come to play with the prime minister's son here.'

Again, like the hiss of a hidden snake, the rustle behind the shutters increased. Evidently some one there understood the child's words.

'Shall you see Miss Kate to-day?'

'Not to-day. 'Tis holiday for me. I do not go to Miss Estes to-day.'

The King turned on Tarvin swiftly, and spoke under his breath.

'Must he see that doctor lady every day? All my people lie to me, in the hope of winning my favour; even Colonel Nolan says that the child is very strong. Speak the truth. He is my first son.'

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‘He is not strong,’ answered Tarvin calmly. ‘Perhaps it would be better to let him see Miss Sheriff this morning. You don’t lose anything by keeping your weather-eye open, you know.’

‘I do not understand,’ said the King; ‘but go to the missionary’s house to-day, my son.’

‘I am to come here and play,’ answered the Prince petulantly.

‘You don’t know what Miss Sheriff’s got for you to play with,’ said Tarvin.

‘What is it?’ asked the Maharaj sharply.

‘You’ve got a carriage and ten troopers,’ replied Tarvin. ‘You’ve only got to go there and find out.’

He drew a letter from his breast-pocket, glancing with liking at the two-cent American stamp, and scribbled a note to Kate on the envelope, which ran thus:—

‘Keep the little fellow with you to-day. There’s a wicked look about things this morning. Find something for him to do; get up games for him; do anything, but keep him away from the Palace. I got your note. All right. I understand.’

He called the Maharaj to him, and handed him the note. ‘Take this to Miss Kate, like a little man, and say I sent you,’ he said.

‘My son is not an orderly,’ said the King surlily.

‘Your son is not very well, and I’m the first to speak the truth to you about him, it seems to me,’ said Tarvin. ‘Gently on that colt’s mouth—you.’ The Foxhall colt was dancing between his grooms.

‘You’ll be thrown,’ said the Maharaj Kunwar, in an ecstasy of delight. ‘He throws all his grooms.’

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At that moment a shutter in the courtyard clicked distinctly three times in the silence.

One of the grooms passed to the off-side of the plunging colt deftly. Tarvin put his foot into the stirrup to spring up, when the saddle turned completely round. Some one let go of the horse's head, and Tarvin had just time to kick his foot free as the animal sprang forward.

'I've seen slicker ways of killing a man than that,' he said quietly. 'Bring my friend back,' he added to one of the grooms; and when the Foxhall colt was under his hands again he cinched him up as the beast had not been girt since he had first felt the bit. 'Now,' he said, and leaped into the saddle, as the King clattered out of the courtyard.

The colt reared on end, landed stiffly on his forefeet, and lashed out. Tarvin, sitting him with the cowboy seat, said quietly to the child, who was still watching his movements, 'Run along, Maharaj. Don't hang around here. Let me see you started for Miss Kate.'

The boy obeyed, with a regretful glance at the prancing horse. Then the Foxhall colt devoted himself to unseating his rider. He refused to quit the courtyard, though Tarvin argued with him, first behind the saddle, and then between the indignant ears. Accustomed to grooms who slipped off at the first sign of rebellion, the Foxhall colt was wrathful. Without warning, he dashed through the archway, wheeled on his haunches, and bolted in pursuit of the Maharajah's mare. Once in the open, sandy country, he felt that he had a field worthy of his powers. Tarvin also saw his opportunity. The Maharajah, known in his youth as a hard rider among a nation of perhaps the hardest riders on earth, turned in his saddle and watched the battle with interest.

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‘You ride like a Rajput,’ he shouted, as Tarvin flew past him. ‘Breathe him on a straight course in the open.’

‘Not till he’s learned who’s boss,’ replied Tarvin, and he wrenched the colt around.

‘Shabash! Shabash! Oh, well done! Well done!’ cried the Maharajah, as the colt answered the bit. ‘Tarvin Sahib, I’ll make you colonel of my regular cavalry.’

‘Ten million irregular devils!’ said Tarvin impolitely. ‘Come back, you brute! Back!’

The horse’s head was bowed on his lathering chest under the pressure of the curb; but before obeying he planted his forefeet, and bucked as viciously as one of Tarvin’s own broncos. ‘Both feet down and chest extended,’ he murmured gaily to himself, as the creature see-sawed up and down. He was in his element, and dreamed himself back in Topaz.

‘Maro! Maro!’ exclaimed the King. ‘Hit him hard! Hit him well!’

‘Oh, let him have his little picnic,’ said Tarvin easily. ‘I like it.’

When the colt was tired he was forced to back for ten yards. ‘Now we’ll go on,’ said Tarvin, and fell into a trot by the side of the Maharajah. ‘That river of yours is full of gold,’ he said, after a moment’s silence, as if continuing an uninterrupted conversation.

‘When I was a young man,’ said the King, ‘I rode pig here. We chased them with the sword in the springtime. That was before the English came. Over there, by that pile of rock, I broke my collar-bone.’

‘Full of gold, Maharajah Sahib. How do you propose to get it out?’

Tarvin knew something already of the King’s discourtesy; he did not mean to give way to it.

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'What do I know?' answered the King solemnly.
'Ask the Agent Sahib.'

'But, look here, who does run this State, you or Colonel Nolan?'

'You know,' returned the Maharajah. 'You have seen.' He pointed north and south. 'There,' he said, 'is one railway line; yonder is another. I am a goat between two wolves.'

'Well, anyway, the country between is your own. Surely you can do what you like with that.'

They had ridden some two or three miles beyond the city, parallel with the course of the Amet River, their horses sinking fetlock-deep in the soft sand. The King looked along the chain of shining pools, the white, rush-tipped hillocks of the desert, and the far distant line of low granite-topped hills, whence the Amet sprang. It was not a prospect to delight the heart of a King.

'Yes; I am lord of all this country,' he said. 'But look you, one-fourth of my revenue is swallowed up by those who collect it; one-fourth those black-faced camel-breeders in the sand there will not pay, and I must not march troops against them; one-fourth I myself, perhaps, receive; but the people who should pay the other fourth do not know to whom it should be sent. Yes; I am a very rich king.'

'Well, any way you look at it, the river ought to treble your income.'

The Maharajah looked at Tarvin intently.

'What would the Government say?' he asked.

'I don't quite see where the Government comes in. You can lay out orange-gardens and take canals around them.' (There was a deep-set twinkle of comprehension in his Majesty's eye.) 'Working the river would

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be much easier. You've tried placer-mining here, haven't you?"

"There was some washing in the bed of the river one summer. My jails were too full of convicts, and I feared rebellion. But there was nothing to see, except those black dogs digging in the sand. That year I won the Poonah Cup with a bay pony."

Tarvin brought his hand down on his thigh with an unguarded smack. What was the use of talking business to this wearied man, who would pawn what the opium had left to him of soul for something to see? He shifted his ground instantly.

"Yes; that sort of mining is nothing to look at. What you want is a little dam up Gungra way."

"Near the hills?"

"Yes."

"No man has ever dammed the Amet," said the King. "It comes out of the ground, and sinks back into the ground, and when the rain falls it is as big as the Indus."

"We'll have the whole bed of it laid bare before the rains begin—bare for twelve miles," said Tarvin, watching the effect on his companion.

"No man has dammed the Amet," was the stony reply.

"No man has ever tried. Give me all the labour I want, and I will dam the Amet."

"Where will the water go?" inquired the King.

"I'll take it around another way, as you took the canal around the orange-garden, of course."

"Ah! Then Colonel Nolan talked to me as if I were a child."

"You know why, Maharajah Sahib," said Tarvin placidly.

The King was frozen for a moment by this audacity.

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He knew that all the secrets of his domestic life were common talk in the mouths of the city, for no man can bridle three hundred women; but he was not prepared to find them so frankly hinted at by this irreverent stranger, who was and was not an Englishman.

‘Colonel Nolan will say nothing this time,’ continued Tarvin. ‘Besides, it will help your people.’

‘Who are also his,’ said the King.

The opium was dying out of his brain, and his head fell forward upon his chest.

‘Then I shall begin to-morrow,’ said Tarvin. ‘It will be something to see. I must find the best place to dam the river, and I daresay you can lend me a few hundred convicts.’

‘But why have you come here at all,’ asked the King, ‘to dam my rivers, and turn my State upside down?’

‘Because it’s good for you to laugh, Maharajah Sahib. You know that as well as I do. I will play pachisi with you every night until you are tired, and I can speak the truth—a rare commodity in these parts.’

‘Did you speak truth about the Maharaj Kunwar? Is he indeed not well?’

‘I have told you he isn’t quite strong. But there’s nothing the matter with him that Miss Sheriff can’t put right.’

‘Is that the truth?’ demanded the King. ‘Remember, he has my throne after me.’

‘If I know Miss Sheriff, he’ll have that throne. Don’t you fret, Maharajah Sahib.’

‘You are great friend of hers?’ pursued his companion. ‘You both come from one country?’

‘Yes,’ assented Tarvin; ‘and one town.’

‘Tell me about that town,’ said the King curiously.

Tarvin, nothing loth, told him—told him at length, in

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detail, and with his own touches of verisimilitude, forgetting in the heat of admiration and affection that the King could understand, at best, not more than one word in ten of his vigorous Western colloquialisms. Half way through his rhapsody the King interrupted.

‘If it was so good, why did you not stay there?’

‘I came to see you,’ said Tarvin quickly. ‘I heard about you there.’

‘Then it is true, what my poets sing to me, that my fame is known in the four corners of the earth? I will fill Bussant Rao’s mouth with gold if it is so.’

‘You can bet your life. Would you like me to go away, though? Say the word!’ Tarvin made as if to check his horse.

The Maharajah remained sunk in deep thought, and when he spoke it was slowly and distinctly, that Tarvin might catch every word. ‘I hate all the English,’ he said. ‘Their ways are not my ways, and they make such trouble over the killing of a man here and there. Your ways are not my ways; but you do not give so much trouble, and you are a friend of the doctor lady.’

‘Well, I hope I’m a friend of the Maharaj Kunwar’s too,’ said Tarvin.

‘Are you a true friend to him?’ asked the King, eyeing him closely.

‘That’s all right. I’d like to see the man who tried to lay a hand on the little one. He’d vanish, King; he’d disappear; he wouldn’t be. I’d mop up Gokral Seetarun with him.’

‘I have seen you hit that rupee. Do it again.’

Without thinking for a moment of the Foxhall colt, Tarvin drew his revolver, tossed a coin into the air, and fired. The coin fell beside them—a fresh one this time

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—marked squarely in the centre. The colt plunged furiously, and the Cutch mare curveted. There was a thunder of hoofs behind him. The escort which, till now, had waited respectfully a quarter of a mile behind, were racing up at full speed, with levelled lances. The King laughed a little contemptuously.

‘They are thinking you have shot me,’ he said. ‘So they will kill you, unless I stop them. Shall I stop them?’

Tarvin thrust out his under jaw with a motion peculiar to himself, wheeled the colt, and waited without answering, his empty hands folded on the pommel of his saddle. The troop swept down in an irregular mob, each man crouching, lance in rest, over his saddle-bow, and the captain of the troop flourishing a long, straight Rajput sword. Tarvin felt rather than saw the lean, venomous lance-heads converging on the breast of the colt. The King drew off a few yards, and watched him where he stood alone in the centre of the plain, waiting. For that single moment, in which he faced death, Tarvin thought to himself that he preferred any customer to a Maharajah.

Suddenly his Highness shouted once, the lance-butts fell as though they had been smitten down, and the troop, opening out, whirled by on each side of Tarvin, each man striving as nearly as might be to brush the white man’s boot.

The white man stared in front of him without turning his head, and the King gave a little grunt of approval.

‘Would you have done that for the Maharaj Kunwar?’ he asked, wheeling his mare in again beside him, after a pause.

‘No,’ said Tarvin placidly. ‘I should have begun shooting long before.’

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‘What! Fifty men?’

‘No; the captain.’

The King shook in his saddle with laughter, and held up his hand. The commandant of the troop trotted up.

‘Ohe, Pertab Singh-Ji, he says he would have shot thee.’ Then, turning to Tarvin, smiling, ‘That is my cousin.’

The burly Rajput captain grinned from ear to ear, and, to Tarvin’s surprise, answered in perfect English—‘That would do for irregular cavalry—to kill the subalterns, you understand—but we are drilled exclusively on English model, and I have my commission from the Queen. Now, in the German army—’

Tarvin looked at him in blank amazement.

‘But you are not connected with the military,’ said Pertab Singh-Ji politely. ‘I have heard how you shot, and I saw what you were doing. But you must please excuse. When a shot is fired near his Highness it is our order always to come up.’

He saluted, and withdrew to his troop.

The sun was growing unpleasantly hot, and the King and Tarvin trotted back toward the city.

‘How many convicts can you lend me?’ asked Tarvin as they went.

‘All my jails full, if you want them,’ was the enthusiastic answer. ‘By God, Sahib, I never saw anything like that. I would give you anything.’

Tarvin took off his hat, and mopped his forehead, laughing.

‘Very good, then. I’ll ask for something that will cost you nothing.’

The Maharajah grunted doubtfully. People generally demanded of him things he was not willing to part with.

‘That talk is new to me, Tarvin Sahib,’ said he.

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‘You’ll see I’m in earnest when I say I only want to look at the Naulahka. I’ve seen all your State diamonds and gold carriages, but I haven’t seen that.’

The Maharajah trotted fifty yards without replying. Then—

‘Do they speak of it where you come from?’

‘Of course. All Americans know that it’s the biggest thing in India. It’s in all the guide-books,’ said Tarvin brazenly.

‘Do the books say where it is? The English people are so wise.’ The Maharajah stared straight in front of him, and almost smiled.

‘No; but they say you know, and I’d like to see it.’

‘You must understand, Tarvin Sahib’—the Maharajah spoke meditatively—‘that this is not a State jewel but the State jewel—the jewel of the State. It is a holy thing. Even I do not keep it, and I cannot give you any order to see it.’

Tarvin’s heart sank.

‘But,’ the Maharajah continued, ‘if I say where it is, you can go at your own risk, without Government interfering. I have seen you are not afraid of risk, and I am a very grateful man. Perhaps the priests will show you; perhaps they will not. Or perhaps you will not find the priests at all. Oh, I forgot; it is not in that temple that I was thinking of. No; it must be in the Gye-Mukh—the Cow’s Mouth. But there are no priests there and nobody goes. Of course it is in the Cow’s Mouth. I thought it was in this city,’ resumed the Maharajah. He spoke as if he were talking of a dropped horse-shoe or a mislaid turban.

‘Oh, of course. The Cow’s Mouth,’ repeated Tarvin, as if this also were in the guide-books.

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Chuckling with renewed animation, the King went on—‘By God, only a very brave man would go to the Gye-Mukh; such a brave man as yourself, Tarvin Sahib,’ he added, giving his companion a shrewd look. ‘Ho, ho! Pertab Singh-Ji would not go. No; not with all his troops that you conquered to-day.’

‘Keep your praise until I’ve earned it, Maharajah Sahib,’ said Tarvin. ‘Wait until I’ve dammed that river.’ He was silent for a while, as if digesting this newest piece of information.

‘Now, you have a city like this city, I suppose?’ said the Maharajah interrogatively, pointing to Rhatore.

Tarvin had overcome, in a measure, his first feeling of contempt for the State of Gokral Seetarun and the city of Rhatore. He had begun to look upon them both, as was his nature in the case of people and things with which he dwelt, with a certain kindness.

‘Topaz is going to be bigger,’ he explained.

‘And when you are there what is your offeicial position?’ asked the Maharajah.

Tarvin, without answering, drew from his breast-pocket the cable from Mrs. Mutrie, and handed it in silence to the King. Where an election was concerned even the sympathy of an opium-soaked Rajput was not indifferent to him.

‘What does it mean?’ asked the King, and Tarvin threw up his hands in despair.

He explained his connection with the government of his State, making the Colorado legislature appear as one of the parliaments of America. He owned up to being the Hon. Nicholas Tarvin, if the Maharajah really wanted to give him his full title.

‘Such as the members of provincial councils that come

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here?' suggested the Maharajah, remembering the gray-headed men who visited him from time to time, charged with authority only little less than that of a viceroy. 'But still you will not write letters to that legislature about my government?' queried he suspiciously, recalling again over-curious emissaries from the British Parliament overseas, who sat their horses like sacks, and talked interminably of good government when he wished to go to bed. 'And above all,' he added slowly, as they drew near to the palace, 'you are most true friend of the Maharaj Kunwar? And your friend, the lady doctor, will make him well?'

'That,' said Tarvin, with a sudden inspiration, 'is what we are both here for!'

XII

This I saw when the rites were done,
And the lamps were dead and the Gods alone,
And the gray snake coiled on the altar stone—
Ere I fled from a Fear that I could not see,
And the Gods of the East made mouths at me.
‘In Seonee.’

WHEN he left the King’s side, Tarvin’s first impulse was to set the Foxhall colt into a gallop, and forthwith depart in search of the Naulahka. He mechanically drove his heels home, and shortened his rein under the impulse of the thought; but the colt’s leap beneath him recalled him to his senses, and he restrained himself and his mount with the same motion.

His familiarity with the people’s grotesque nomenclature left him unimpressed by the Cow’s Mouth as a name for a spot, but he gave some wonder to the question why the thing should be in the Cow’s Mouth. This was a matter to be laid before Estes.

‘These heathen,’ he said to himself, ‘are just the sort to hide it away in a salt-lick, or bury it in a hole in the ground. Yes; a hole is about their size. They put the State diamonds in cracker-boxes tied up with boot-laces. The Naulahka is probably hanging on a tree.’

As he trotted toward the missionary’s house, he looked at the hopeless landscape with new interest, for any spur

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of the low hills, or any roof in the jumbled city, might contain his treasure.

Estes, who had outlived many curiosities, and knew Rajputana as a prisoner knows the bricks of his cell, turned on Tarvin, in reply to the latter's direct question, a flood of information. There were mouths of all kinds in India, from the Burning Mouth in the north, where a jet of natural gas was worshipped by millions as the incarnation of a divinity, to the Devil's Mouth among some forgotten Buddhist ruins in the furthest southern corner of Madras.

There was also a Cow's Mouth some hundreds of miles away, in the courtyard of a temple at Benares, much frequented by devotees; but as far as Rajputana was concerned, there was only one Cow's Mouth, and that was to be found in a dead city.

The missionary launched into a history of wars and rapine, extending over hundreds of years, all centring round one rock-walled city in the wilderness, which had been the pride and the glory of the kings of Mewar. Tarvin listened with patience as infinite as his weariness—ancient history had no charm for the man who was making his own town—while Estes enlarged upon the past, and told stories of voluntary immolation on the pyre in subterranean palaces by thousands of Rajput women, who, when the city fell before a Mohammedan, and their kin had died in the last charge of defence, cheated the conquerors of all but the empty glory of conquest. Estes had a taste for archæology, and it was a pleasure to him to speak of it to a fellow-countryman.

By retracing the ninety-six miles to Rawut Junction, Tarvin might make connection with a train that would carry him sixty-seven miles westward to yet another

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junction, where he would change and go south by rail for a hundred and seven miles; and this would bring him within four miles of this city, its marvellous nine-storied tower of glory, which he was to note carefully, its stupendous walls and desolate palaces. The journey would occupy at least two days. At this point Tarvin suggested a map, and a glance at it showed him that Estes proposed an elaborate circus round three sides of a square, whereas a spider-like line ran more or less directly from Rhatore to Gunnaur.

‘This seems shorter,’ he said.

‘It’s only a country road, and you have had some experience of roads in this State. Fifty-seven miles on a kutcha road in this sun would be fatal.’

Tarvin smiled to himself. He had no particular dread of the sun, which, year by year, had stolen from his companion something of his vitality.

‘I think I’ll ride, anyhow. It seems a waste to travel half round India to get at a thing across the road, though it is the custom of the country.’

He asked the missionary what the Cow’s Mouth was like, and Estes explained archæologically, architecturally, and philologically to such good purpose that Tarvin understood that it was some sort of a hole in the ground — an ancient, a remarkably ancient, hole of peculiar sanctity, but nothing more than a hole.

Tarvin decided to start without an hour’s delay. The dam might wait until he returned. It was hardly likely that the King’s outburst of generosity would lead him to throw open his jails on the morrow. Tarvin debated for a while whether he should tell him of the excursion he was proposing to himself, and then decided that he would look at the necklace first, and open negotiations

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later. This seemed to suit the customs of the country. He returned to the rest-house with Estes' map in his pocket to take stock of his stable. Like other men of the West, he reckoned a horse a necessity before all necessities, and had purchased one mechanically immediately after his arrival. It had been a comfort to him to note all the tricks of all the men he had ever traded horses with faithfully reproduced in the lean, swarthy Cabuli trader, who had led his kicking, plunging horse up to the veranda one idle evening; and it had been a greater comfort to battle with them as he had battled in the old days. The result of the skirmish, fought out in broken English and expressive American, was an unhandsome, doubtful-tempered, mouse-coloured Kathiawar stallion, who had been dismissed for vice from the service of his Majesty, and who weakly believed that, having eaten pieces out of the troopers of the Deolee Irregular Horse, ease and idleness awaited him. Tarvin had undeceived him leisurely, in such moments as he most felt the need of doing something, and the Kathiawar, though never grateful, was at least civil. He had been christened Fibby Winks in recognition of ungentlemanly conduct and a resemblance which Tarvin fancied he detected between the beast's lean face and that of the man who had jumped his claim.

Tarvin threw back the loin cloth as he came upon Fibby drowsing in the afternoon sun behind the rest-house.

'We're going for a little walk down town, Fibby,' he said.

The Kathiawar squealed and snapped.

'Yes; you always were a loafer, Fibby.'

Fibby was saddled by his nervous native attendant, while Tarvin took a blanket from his room and rolled up

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into it an imaginative assortment of provisions. Fibby was to find his rations where Heaven pleased. Then he set out as light-heartedly as though he were going for a canter round the city. It was now about three in the afternoon. All Fibby's boundless reserves of ill-temper and stubborn obstinacy Tarvin resolved should be devoted, by the aid of his spurs, to covering the fifty-seven miles to Gunnaur in the next ten hours, if the road were fair. If not, he should be allowed another two hours. The return journey would not require spurs. There was a moon that night, and Tarvin knew enough of native roads in Gokral Seetarun, and rough trails elsewhere, to be certain that he would not be confused by cross-tracks.

It being borne into Fibby's mind that he was required to advance, not in three directions at once, but in one, he clicked his bit comfortably in his mouth, dropped his head, and began to trot steadily. Then Tarvin pulled him up, and addressed him tenderly.

'Fib, my boy, we're not out for exercise—you'll learn that before sundown. Some galoot has been training you to waste your time over the English trot. I'll be discussing other points with you in the course of the campaign; but we'll settle this now. Drop it, Fibby, and behave like a man-horse.'

Tarvin was obliged to make further remarks on the same subject before Fibby returned to the easy native lope, which is also a common Western pace, tiring neither man nor beast. By this he began to understand that a long journey was demanded of him, and, lowering his tail, buckled down to it.

At first he moved in a cloud of sandy dust with the cotton wains and the country carts that were creaking out to the far distant railway at Gunnaur. As the sun

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began to sink, his gaunt shadow danced like a goblin across low-lying volcanic rock tufted with shrubs, and here and there an aloe.

The carters unyoked their cattle on the roadside, and prepared to eat their evening meal by the light of dull red fires. Fibby cocked one ear wistfully toward the flames, but held on through the gathering shadows, and Tarvin smelt the acrid juice of bruised camel-thorn beneath his horse's hoofs. The moon rose in splendour behind him, and, following his lurching shadow, he overtook a naked man who bore over his shoulder a stick loaded with jingling bells, and fled panting and perspiring from one who followed him armed with a naked sword. This was the mail-carrier and his escort running to Gunnar. The jingling died away on the dead air, and Fibby was ambling between interminable lines of thorn bushes that threw mad arms to the stars, and cast shadows as solid as themselves across the road. Some beast of the night plunged through the thicket alongside, and Fibby snorted in panic. Then a porcupine crossed under his nose with a rustle of quills, and left an evil stench to poison the stillness for a moment. A point of light gleamed ahead, where a bullock-cart had broken down, and the drivers were sleeping peacefully till daylight should show the injury. Here Fibby stopped, and Tarvin, through the magic of a rupee, representing fortune to the rudely awakened sleepers, procured food and a little water for him, eased the girths, and made as much of him as he was disposed to permit. On starting again, Fibby found his second wind, and with it there woke the spirit of daring and adventure inherited from his ancestors, who were accustomed to take their masters thirty leagues in a day for the sacking of a town, to sleep by a

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lance driven into the earth as a picket, and to return whence they had come before the ashes of the houses had lost heat. So Fibby lifted his tail valiantly, neighed, and began to move.

The road descended for miles, crossing the dry beds of many water-courses and once a broad river, where Fibby stopped for another drink, and would have lain down to roll in a melon-bed but that his rider spurred him on up the slope. The country grew more fertile at every mile, and rolled in broader waves. Under the light of the setting moon, the fields showed silver-white with the opium-poppy, or dark with sugar-cane.

Poppy and sugar ceased together, as Fibby topped a long, slow ascent, and with distended nostrils snuffed for the wind of the morning. He knew that the day would bring him rest. Tarvin peered forward where the white line of the road disappeared in the gloom of velvety scrub. He commanded a vast level plain flanked by hills of soft outline—a plain that in the dim light seemed as level as the sea. Like the sea, too, it bore on its breast a ship, like a gigantic monitor with a sharp bow, cutting her way from north to south; such a ship as man never yet has seen—two miles long, with three or four hundred feet freeboard, lonely, silent, mastless, without lights, a derelict of the earth.

'We are nearly there, Fib, my boy,' said Tarvin, drawing rein, and scanning the monstrous thing by the starlight. 'We'll get as close as we can, and then wait for the daylight before going aboard.'

They descended the slope, which was covered with sharp stones and sleeping goats. Then the road turned sharply to the left, and began to run parallel to the ship. Tarvin urged Fibby into a more direct path, and the

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good horse blundered piteously across the scrub-covered ground, cut up and channelled by the rains into a network of six-foot ravines and gulches.

Here he gave out with a despairing grunt. Tarvin took pity on him, and, fastening him to a tree, bade him think of his sins till breakfast-time, and dropped from his back into a dry and dusty water-hole. Ten steps further, and the scrub was all about him, whipping him across the brows, hooking thorns into his jacket, and looping roots in front of his knees as he pushed on up an ever-steeperning incline.

At last Tarvin was crawling on his hands and knees, grimed from head to foot, and hardly to be distinguished from the wild pigs that passed like slate-coloured shadows through the tangle of the thickets on their way to their rest. Too absorbed to hear them grunt, he pulled and screwed himself up the slope, tugging at the roots as though he would rend the Naulahka from the bowels of the earth, and swearing piously at every step. When he stopped to wipe the sweat from his face, he found, more by touch than by eye, that he knelt at the foot of a wall that ran up into the stars. Fibby, from the tangle below, was neighing dolefully.

‘You’re not hurt, Fibby,’ he gasped, spitting out some fragments of dry grass; ‘you aren’t on in this scene. Nobody’s asking you to fly to-night,’ he said, looking hopelessly up at the wall again, and whistling softly in response to an owl’s hooting overhead.

He began to pick his way between the foot of the wall and the scrub that grew up to it, passing one hand against the huge cut stones, and holding the other before his face. A fig-seed had found foothold between two of the gigantic slabs, and, undisturbed through the cen-

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turies, had grown into an arrogant, gnarled tree, that writhed between the fissures and heaved the stonework apart. Tarvin considered for a while whether he could climb into the crook of the lowest branch, then moved on a few steps, and found the wall rent from top to bottom through the twenty feet of its thickness, allowing passage for the head of an army.

'Like them, exactly like them!' he mused. 'I might have expected it. To build a wall sixty feet high, and put an eighty-foot hole in it! The Naulahka must be lying out on a bush, or a child's playing with it, and—I can't get it!'

He plunged through the gap, and found himself amid scattered pillars, slabs of stone, broken lintels, and tumbled tombs, and heard a low, thick hiss almost under his riding-boots. No man born of woman needs to be instructed in the voice of the serpent.

Tarvin jumped, and stayed still. Fibby's neigh came faintly now. The dawn-wind blew through the gap in the wall, and Tarvin wiped his forehead with a deep sigh of relief. He would do no more till the light came. This was the hour to eat and drink; also to stand very still, because of that voice from the ground.

He pulled food and a flask from his pocket, and, staring before him in every direction, ate hungrily. The loom of the night lifted a little, and he could see the outline of some great building a few yards away. Beyond this were other shadows, faint as the visions in a dream—the shadows of yet more temples and lines of houses; the wind, blowing among them, brought back a rustle of tossing hedges.

The shadows grew more distinct: he could see that he was standing with his face to some decayed tomb. Then

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his jaw fell, for, without warning or presage, the red dawn shot up behind him, and there leaped out of the night the city of the dead. Tall-built, sharp-domed palaces, flushing to the colour of blood, revealed the horror of their emptiness, and glared at the day that pierced them through and through.

The wind passed singing down the empty streets, and, finding none to answer, returned, chasing before it a muttering cloud of dust, which presently whirled itself into a little cyclone-funnel, and lay down with a sigh.

A screen of fretted marble lay on the dry grass, where it had fallen from some window above, and a gecko crawled over it to sun himself. Already the dawn flush had passed. The hot light was everywhere, and a kite had poised himself in the parched blue sky. The day, new-born, might have been as old as the city. It seemed to Tarvin that he and it were standing still to hear the centuries race by on the wings of the purposeless dust.

As he took his first step into the streets, a peacock stepped from the threshold of a lofty red house, and spread his tail in the splendour of the sun. Tarvin halted, and with perfect gravity took off his hat to the royal bird, where it blazed against the sculptures on the wall, the sole living thing in sight.

The silence of the place and the insolent nakedness of the empty ways lay on him like a dead weight. For a long time he did not care to whistle, but rambled aimlessly from one wall to another, looking at the gigantic reservoirs, dry and neglected, the hollow guard-houses that studded the battlements, the time-riven arches that spanned the streets, and, above all, the carven tower with a shattered roof that sprang a hundred and fifty feet into the air, for a sign to the country-side that the royal city

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of Gunnaur was not dead, but would one day hum with men.

It was from this tower, encrusted with figures in high relief of beast and man, that Tarvin, after a heavy climb, looked out on the vast sleeping land in the midst of which the dead city lay. He saw the road by which he had come in the night, dipping and reappearing again over thirty miles of country, saw the white poppy-fields, the dull-brown scrub, and the unending plain to the northward, cut by the shining line of the rail. From his eyrie he peered forth as a man peers from a crow's-nest at sea; for, once down there below in the city, all view was cut off by the battlements that rose like bulwarks. On the side nearest to the railroad, sloping causeways, paved with stone, ran down to the plain under many gates, as the gangway of a ship when it is let down, and through the gaps in the walls—time and the trees had torn their way to and fro—there was nothing to be seen except the horizon, which might have been the deep sea.

He thought of Fibby waiting in the scrub for his breakfast, and made haste to descend to the streets again. Remembering the essentials of his talk with Estes as to the position of the Cow's Mouth, he passed up a side-lane, disturbing the squirrels and monkeys that had taken up their quarters in the cool dark of the rows of empty houses. The last house ended in a heap of ruins among a tangle of mimosa and tall grass, through which ran a narrow foot-track.

Tarvin marked the house as the first actual ruin he had seen. His complaint against all the others, the temples and the palaces, was that they were not ruined, but dead—empty, swept, and garnished, with the seven devils of loneliness in riotous possession. In time—in a

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few thousand years perhaps—the city would crumble away. He was distinctly glad that one house at least had set the example.

The path dropped beneath his feet on a shelf of solid rock that curved over like the edge of a waterfall. Tarvin took only one step, and fell, for the rock was worn into deep gutters, smoother than ice, by the naked feet of millions who had trodden that way for no man knew how many years. When he rose he heard a malignant chuckle, half suppressed, which ended in a choking cough, ceased, and broke out anew. Tarvin registered an oath to find that scoffer when he had found the necklace, and looked to his foothold more carefully. At this point it seemed that the Cow's Mouth must be some sort of disused quarry fringed to the lips with rank vegetation.

All sight of what lay below him was blocked by the thick foliage of trees that leaned forward, bowing their heads together as night-watchers huddle over a corpse. Once upon a time there had been rude steps leading down the almost sheer descent, but the naked feet had worn them to glassy knobs and lumps, and blown dust had made a thin soil in their chinks. Tarvin looked long and angrily, because the laugh came from the bottom of this track, and then, digging his heel into the mould, began to let himself down step by step, steadyng himself by the tufts of grass. Before he had realised it, he was out of reach of the sun, and neck deep in tall grass. Still there was a sort of pathway under his feet, down the almost perpendicular side. He gripped the grass, and went on. The earth beneath his elbows grew moist, and the rock where it cropped out showed rotten with moisture and coated with moss. The air grew cold and damp. Another plunge downward revealed to him what the

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trees were guarding, as he drew breath on a narrow stone ledge. They sprang from the masonry round the sides of a square tank of water so stagnant that it had corrupted past corruption, and lay dull blue under the blackness of the trees. The drought of summer had shrunk it, and a bank of dried mud ran round its sides. The head of a sunken stone pillar, carved with monstrous and obscene gods, reared itself from the water like the head of a tortoise swimming to land. The birds moved in the sunlit branches of the trees far overhead. Little twigs and berries dropped into the water, and the noise of their fall echoed from side to side of the tank that received no sunlight.

The chuckle that had so annoyed Tarvin broke out again as he listened. This time it was behind him, and wheeling sharply, he saw that it came from a thin stream of water that spurted fitfully from the rudely carved head of a cow, and dripped along a stone spout into the heavy blue pool. Behind that spout the moss-grown rock rose sheer. This, then, was the Cow's Mouth.

The tank lay at the bottom of a shaft, and the one way down to it was that by which Tarvin had come—a path that led from the sunlight to the chill and mould of a vault.

'Well, this is kind of the King, anyhow,' he said, pacing the ledge cautiously, for it was almost as slippery as the pathway on the rocks. 'Now, what's the use of this?' he continued, returning. The ledge ran only round one side of the tank, and, unless he trusted to the mudbanks on the other three, there was no hope of continuing his exploration further. The Cow's Mouth chuckled again, as a fresh jet of water forced its way through the formless jaws.

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'Oh, dry up!' he muttered impatiently, staring through the half light that veiled all.

He dropped a piece of rock on the mud under the lip of the ledge, then tested it with a cautious foot, found that it bore, and decided to walk round the tank. As there were more trees to the right of the ledge than to the left, he stepped off on the mud from the right, holding cautiously to the branches and the tufts of grass in case of any false step.

When the tank was first made its rock walls had been perfectly perpendicular, but time and weather and the war of the tree roots had broken and scarred the stone in a thousand places, giving a scant foothold here and there.

Tarvin crept along the right side of the tank, resolved, whatever might come, to go round it. The gloom deepened as he came directly under the largest fig-tree, throwing a thousand arms across the water, and buttressing the rock with snake-like roots as thick as a man's body. Here, sitting on a bole, he rested and looked at the ledge. The sun, shooting down the path that he had trampled through the tall grass, threw one patch of light on the discoloured marble of the ledge and on the blunt muzzle of the cow's head; but where Tarvin rested under the fig-tree there was darkness, and an intolerable scent of musk. The blue water was not inviting to watch; he turned his face inward to the rock and the trees, and, looking up, caught the emerald-green of a parrot's wing moving among the upper branches. Never in his life had Tarvin so acutely desired the blessed sunshine. He was cold and damp, and conscious that a gentle breeze was blowing in his face from between the snaky tree roots.

It was the sense of space more than actual sight that

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told him that there was a passage before him shrouded by the roots on which he sat, and it was his racial instinct of curiosity rather than any love of adventure that led him to throw himself at the darkness, which parted before and closed behind him. He could feel that his feet were treading on cut stone overlaid with a thin layer of dried mud, and, extending his arms, found masonry on either side. Then he lighted a match, and congratulated himself that his ignorance of cows' mouths had not led him to bring a lantern with him. The first match flickered in the draught and went out, and before the flame had died he heard a sound in front of him like the shivering backward draw of a wave on a pebbly beach. The noise was not inspiriting, but Tarvin pressed on for a few steps, looking back to see that the dull glimmer of the outer day was still behind him, and lighted another match, guarding it with his hands. At his next step he shuddered from head to foot. His heel had crashed through a skull on the ground.

The match showed him that he had quitted the passage, and was standing in a black space of unknown dimensions. He fancied that he saw the outline of a pillar, or rows of pillars, flickering drunkenly in the gloom, and was all too sure that the ground beneath him was strewn with bones. Then he became aware of pale emerald eyes watching him fixedly, and perceived that there was deep breathing in the place other than his own. He flung the match down, the eyes retreated, there was a wild rattle and crash in the darkness, a howl that might have been bestial or human, and Tarvin, panting between the tree roots, swung himself to the left, and fled back over the mudbanks to the ledge, where he stood, his back to the Cow's Mouth, and his revolver in his hand.

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In that moment of waiting for what might emerge from the hole in the side of the tank, Tarvin tasted all the agonies of pure physical terror. Then he noted with the tail of his eye that a length of mudbank to his left—half the mudbank, in fact—was moving slowly into the water. It floated slowly across the tank, a long welt of filth and slime. Nothing came out of the hole between the fig-tree roots, but the mudbank grounded under the ledge almost at Tarvin's feet, and opened horny eyelids, heavy with green slime.

The Western man is familiar with many strange things, but the alligator does not come within the common range of his experiences. A second time Tarvin moved from point to point without being able to explain the steps he took to that end. He found himself sitting in the sunshine at the head of the slippery path that led downwards. His hands were full of the wholesome jungle grass and the clean dry dust. He could see the dead city about him, and he felt that it was home.

The Cow's Mouth chuckled and choked out of sight as it had chuckled since the making of the tank, and that was at the making of time. A man, old, crippled, and all but naked, came through the high grass leading a little kid, and calling mechanically from time to time, 'Ao, Bhai! Ao!' 'Come, brother! Come!' Tarvin marvelled first at his appearance on earth at all, and next that he could so unconcernedly descend the path to the darkness and the horror below. He did not know that the sacred crocodile of the Cow's Mouth was waiting for his morning meal, as he had waited in the days when Gunnaur was peopled, and its queens never dreamed of death.

XIII

Beat off in our last fight were we?
The greater need to seek the sea;
For Fortune changeth as the moon
To caravel and picaroon.
Then, Eastward Ho! or Westward Ho!
Whichever wind may meetest blow.
Our quarry sails on either sea,
Fat prey for such bold lads as we.
And every sun-dried buccaneer
Must hand and reef and watch and steer,
And bear great wrath of sea and sky
Before the plate-ships wallow by. . . .
Now, as our tall bow takes the foam,
Let no man turn his heart to home,
Save to desire land the more,
And larger warehouse for his store,
When treasure won from Santos Bay
Shall make our sea-washed village gay.

‘Blackbeard.’

FIBBY and Tarvin ate their breakfast together, half an hour later, in the blotched shadows of the scrub below the wall. The horse buried his nose into his provender and said nothing. The man was equally silent. Once or twice he rose to his feet, scanned the irregular line of wall and bastion, and shook his head.

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He had no desire to return there. As the sun grew fiercer he found a resting-place in the heart of a circle of thorn, tucked the saddle under his head, and lay down to sleep. Fibby, rolling luxuriously, followed his master's example. The two took their rest while the air quivered with heat and the hum of insects, and the browsing goats clicked and pattered through the water-channels.

The shadow of the Tower of Glory lengthened, fell across the walls, and ran far across the plain; the kites began to drop from the sky by twos and threes; and naked children, calling one to another, collected the goats and drove them to the smoky villages before Tarvin roused himself for the homeward journey.

He halted Fibby once for a last look at Gunnaur as they reached the rising ground. The sunlight had left the walls, and they ran black against the misty levels and the turquoise-blue of the twilight. Fires twinkled from a score of huts about the base of the city, but along the ridge of the desolation itself there was no light.

'Mum's the word, Fibby,' said Tarvin, picking up his reins. 'We don't think well of this picnic. We won't mention it at Rhatore.'

He chirruped, and Fibby went home as swiftly as he could lay hoof to stone, only once suggesting refreshment. Tarvin said nothing till the end of the long ride, when he heaved a deep sigh of relief as he dismounted in the fresh sunlight of the morning.

Sitting in his room, it seemed to him a waste of a most precious opportunity that he had not manufactured a torch in Gunnaur and thoroughly explored the passage. But the memory of the green eyes and the smell of musk came back to him, and he shivered. The thing was not to be done. Never again, for any consideration, under

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the wholesome light of the sun, would he, who feared nothing, set foot in the Cow's Mouth.

It was his pride that he knew when he had had enough. He had had enough of the Cow's Mouth; and the only thing for which he still wished in connection with it was to express his mind about it to the Maharajah. Unhappily, this was impossible. That idle monarch, who, he now saw plainly, had sent him there either in a mood of luxurious sportiveness or to throw him off the scent of the necklace, remained the only man from whom he could look for final victory. It was not to the Maharajah that he could afford to say all that he thought.

Fortunately the Maharajah was too much entertained by the work which Tarvin immediately instituted on the Amet River to inquire particularly whether his young friend had sought the Naulahka at the Gye-Mukh. Tarvin had sought an audience with the King the morning after his return from that black spot, and, with the face of a man who had never known fear and who lacks the measure of disappointments, gaily demanded the fulfilment of the King's promise. Having failed in one direction on a large scale, he laid the first brick on the walls of a new structure without delay, as the people of Topaz had begun to build their town anew the morning after the fire. His experience at the Gye-Mukh only sharpened his determination, adding to it a grim willingness to get even with the man who had sent him there.

The Maharajah, who felt in especial need of amusement that morning, was very ready to make good his promise, and ordered that the long man who played pachisi should be granted all the men he could use. With the energy of disgust, and with a hot memory of the least assured and comfortable moments of his life burn-

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ing in his breast, Tarvin flung himself on the turning of the river and the building of his dam. It was necessary, it seemed, in the land upon which he had fallen, to raise a dust to hide one's ends. He would raise a dust, and it should be on the same scale as the catastrophe which he had just encountered—thorough, business-like, uncompromising.

He raised it, in fact, in a stupendous cloud. Since the State was founded no one had seen anything like it. The Maharajah lent him all the convict labour of his jails, and Tarvin marched the little host of leg-ironed kaidies into camp at a point five miles beyond the city walls, and solemnly drew up his plans for the futile damming of the barren Amet. His early training as a civil engineer helped him to lay out a reasonable plan of operations, and to give a semblance of reality to his work. His notion was to back up the river by means of a dam at a point where it swept around a long curve, and to send it straight across the plain by excavating a deep bed for it. When this was completed the present bed of the river would lie bare for several miles, and if there were any gold there, as Tarvin said to himself, then would be the time to pick it up. Meanwhile his operations vastly entertained the King, who rode out every morning and watched him directing his small army for an hour or more. The marchings and counter-marchings of the mob of convicts with baskets, hoes, shovels, and pannier-laden donkeys, the prodigal blasting of rocks, and the general bustle and confusion, drew the applause of the King, for whom Tarvin always reserved his best blasts. This struck him as only fair, as the King was paying for the powder, and, indeed, for the entire entertainment.

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Among the unpleasant necessities of his position was the need of giving daily to Colonel Nolan, to the King, and to all the drummers at the rest-house, whenever they might choose to ask him, his reasons for damming the Amet. The great Indian Government itself also presently demanded his reasons, in writing, for damming the Amet; Colonel Nolan's reasons, in writing, for allowing the Amet to be dammed; and the King's reasons for allowing anybody but a duly authorised agent of the Government to dam the Amet. This was accompanied by a request for further information. To these inquiries Tarvin, for his part, returned an evasive answer, and felt that he was qualifying himself for his political career at home. Colonel Nolan explained officially to his superiors that the convicts were employed in remunerative labour, and unofficially, that the Maharajah had been so phenomenally good for some time past (being kept amused by this American stranger), that it would be a thousand pities to interrupt the operations. Colonel Nolan was impressed by the fact that Tarvin was the Hon. Nicholas Tarvin, and a member of the legislature of one of the United States.

The Government, knowing something of the irrepressible race who stride booted into the council-halls of kings, and demand concessions for oil-boring from Arracan to the Peshin, said no more, but asked to be supplied with information from time to time as to the progress of the stranger's work. When Tarvin heard this he sympathised with the Indian Government. He understood this thirst for information; he wanted some himself as to the present whereabouts of the Naulahka; also touching the time it would take Kate to find out that she wanted him more than the cure of any misery whatever.

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At least twice a week, in fancy, he gave up the Naulahka definitely, returned to Topaz, and resumed the business of a real estate and insurance agent. He drew a long breath after each of these decisions, with the satisfying recollection that there was still one spot on the earth's surface where a man might come directly at his desires if he possessed the sand and the hustle; where he could walk a straight path to his ambition; and where he did not by preference turn five corners to reach an object a block away.

Sometimes, as he grilled patiently in the river bed under the blighting rays of the Indian sun, he would heretically blaspheme the Naulahka, refusing to believe in its existence, and persuading himself that it was as grotesque a lie as the King's parody of a civilised government, or as Dhunpat Rai's helpful surgery. Yet from a hundred sources he heard of the existence of that splendour, only never in reply to a direct question.

Dhunpat Rai, in particular (once weak enough to complain of the new lady doctor's 'excessive zeal and surplusage administration'), had given him an account that made his mouth water. But Dhunpat Rai had not seen the necklace since the crowning of the present King, fifteen years before. The very convicts on the works, squabbling over the distribution of food, spoke of millet as being as costly as the Naulahka. Twice the Maharaj Kunwar, babbling vaingloriously to his big friend of what he would do when he came to the throne, concluded his confidences with, 'And then I shall wear the Naulahka in my turban all day long.'

But when Tarvin asked him where that precious necklace lived, the Maharaj Kunwar shook his head, answering sweetly, 'I do not know.'

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The infernal thing seemed to be a myth, a word, a proverb—anything rather than the finest necklace in the world. In the intervals of blasting and excavation he would make futile attempts to come upon its track. He took the city ward by ward, and explored every temple in each; he rode, under pretence of archæological study, to the outlying forts and ruined palaces that lay beyond the city in the desert, and roved restlessly through the mausoleums that held the ashes of the dead kings of Rhatore. He told himself a hundred times that he knew each quest to be hopeless; but he needed the consolation of persistent search. And the search was always vain.

Tarvin fought his impatience when he rode abroad with the Maharajah. At the palace, which he visited at least once a day under pretence of talking about the dam, he devoted himself more sedulously than ever to pachisi. It pleased the Maharajah in those days to remove himself from the white marble pavilion in the orange-garden, where he usually spent the spring months, to Sitabhai's wing of the red-stone palace, and to sit in the courtyard watching trained parrots firing little cannons, and witnessing combats between fighting quail or great gray apes dressed in imitation of English officers. When Colonel Nolan appeared the apes were hastily dismissed; but Tarvin was allowed to watch the play throughout, when he was not engaged on the dam. He was forced to writhe in inaction and in wonder about his necklace, while these childish games went forward; but he constantly kept the corner of an eye upon the movements of the Mararaj Kunwar. There, at least, his wit could serve some one.

The Maharajah had given strict orders that the child

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should obey all Kate's instructions. Even his heavy eyes noted an improvement in the health of the little one, and Tarvin was careful that he should know that the credit belonged to Kate alone. With impish perversity the young Prince, who had never received an order in his life before, learned to find joy in disobedience, and devoted his wits, his escort, and his barouche to gambolling in the wing of the palace belonging to Sitabhai. There he found gray-headed flatterers by the score, who abased themselves before him, and told him what manner of king he should be in the years to come. There also were pretty dancing-girls, who sang him songs, and would have corrupted his mind but that it was too young to receive corruption. There were, besides, apes and peacocks and jugglers—new ones every day—together with dancers on the slack-rope, and wonderful packing-cases from Calcutta, out of which he was allowed to choose ivory-handled pistols and little gold-hilted swords with seed pearls set in a groove along the middle, and running musically up and down as he waved the blade round his head. Finally, the sacrifice of a goat in an opal and ivory temple in the heart of the women's quarters, which he might watch, allured him that way. Against these enticements Kate, moody, grave, distracted, her eyes full of the miseries on which it was her daily lot to look, and her heart torn with the curelessness of it all, could offer only little childish games in the missionary's drawing-room. The heir-apparent to the throne did not care for leap-frog, which he deemed in the highest degree undignified; nor yet for puss-in-the-corner, which seemed to him over-active; nor for tennis, which he understood was played by his brother princes, but which to him appeared no part of a Rajput's education. Sometimes,

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when he was tired (and on rare occasions when he escaped to Sitabhai's wing it was observable that he returned very tired indeed), he would listen long and intently to the stories of battle and siege which Kate read to him, and would scandalise her at the end of the tale by announcing, with flashing eye—

‘When I am king I will make my army do all those things.’

It was not in Kate's nature—she would have thought it in the highest degree wrong—to refrain from some little attempt at religious instruction. But here the child retreated into the stolidity of the East, and only said—

‘All these things are very good for you, Kate, but all my gods are very good for me; and if my father knew, he would be angry.’

‘And what do you worship?’ asked Kate, pitying the young pagan from the bottom of her heart.

‘My sword and my horse,’ answered the Maharaj Kunwar; and he half drew the jewelled sabre that was his inseparable companion, returning it with a resolute clank that closed the discussion.

But it was impossible, he discovered, to evade the long man Tarvin as he evaded Kate. He resented being called ‘bub,’ nor did he approve of ‘little man.’ But Tarvin could drawl the word ‘Prince’ with a quiet deference that made the young Rajput almost suspect himself the subject of a jest. And yet Tarvin Sahib treated him as a man, and allowed him, under due precautions, to handle his mighty ‘gun,’ which was not a gun, but a pistol. And once, when the Prince had coaxed the keeper of the horse into allowing him to bestride an unmanageable mount, Tarvin, riding up, had picked him

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out of the depths of the velvet saddle, set him on his own saddle-bow, and, in the same cloud of dust, shown him how, in his own country, they laid the reins on one side or the other of the neck of their cattle-ponies to guide them in pursuit of a steer broken from the herd.

The trick of being lifted from his saddle, appealing to the ‘circus’ latent in the boy breast even of an Eastern prince, struck the Maharaj as so amusing that he insisted on exhibiting it before Kate; and as Tarvin was a necessary figure in the performance, he allured him into helping him with it one day before the house of the missionary. Mr. and Mrs. Estes came out upon the veranda with Kate and watched the exhibition, and the missionary pursued it with applause and requests for a repetition, which, having been duly given, Mrs. Estes asked Tarvin if he would not stay to dinner with them since he was there. Tarvin glanced doubtfully at Kate for permission, and, by a process of reasoning best known to lovers, construed the veiling of her eyes and the turning of her head into assent.

After dinner, as they sat on the veranda in the starlight, ‘Do you really mind?’ he asked.

‘What?’ asked she, lifting her sober eyes and letting them fall upon him.

‘My seeing you sometimes. I know you don’t like it; but it will help me to look after you. You must see by this time that you need looking after.’

‘Oh no.’

‘Thank you,’ said Tarvin, almost humbly.

‘I mean I don’t need looking after.’

‘But you don’t dislike it?’

‘It’s good of you,’ she said impartially.

‘Well, then, it will be bad of you not to like it.’

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Kate had to smile. ‘I guess I like it,’ she replied.

‘And you will let me come once in a while? You can’t think what the rest-house is. Those drummers will kill me yet. And the coolies at the dam are not in my set.’

‘Well, since you’re here. But you ought not to be here. Do me a real kindness, and go away, Nick.’

‘Give me an easier one.’

‘But why are you here? You can’t show any rational reason.’

‘Yes; that’s what the British Government says. But I brought my reason along.’

He confessed his longing for something homely and natural and American after a day’s work under a heathen and raging sun; and when he put it in this light, Kate responded on another side. She had been brought up with a sense of responsibility for making young men feel at home; and he certainly felt at home when she was able to produce, two or three evenings later, a Topaz paper sent her by her father. Tarvin pounced on it, and turned the flimsy four pages inside out, and then back again.

He smacked his lips. ‘Oh, good, good, good!’ he murmured relishingly. ‘Don’t the advertisements look nice? What’s the matter with Topaz?’ cried he, holding the sheet from him at arm’s length, and gazing ravenously up and down its columns. ‘Oh, she’s all right.’ The cooing, musical sing-song in which he uttered this consecrated phrase was worth going a long way to hear. ‘Say, we’re coming on, aren’t we? We’re not lagging nor loafing, nor fooling our time away, if we haven’t got the Three C.’s yet? We’re keeping up with the procession. Hi-yi! look at the “Rustler Rootlets”—just about a stickful! Why, the poor old worm-eaten town

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is going sound, sound asleep in her old age, isn't she? Think of taking a railroad there! Listen to this:—

“Milo C. Lambert, the owner of ‘Lambert’s Last Ditch,’ has a car-load of good ore on the dump, but, like all the rest of us, don’t find it pays to ship without a railroad line nearer than fifteen miles. Milo says Colorado won’t be good enough for him after he gets his ore away.”

‘I should think not. Come to Topaz, Milo! And this:—

“When the Three C.’s comes into the city in the fall we shan’t be hearing this talk about hard times. Meantime it’s an injustice to the town, which all honest citizens should resent and do their best to put down, to speak of Rustler as taking a back seat to any town of its age in the State. As a matter of fact, Rustler was never more prosperous. With mines which produced last year ore valued at a total of \$1,200,000, with six churches of different denominations, with a young but prosperous and growing academy which is destined to take a front rank among American schools, with a record of new buildings erected during the past year equal if not superior to any town in the mountains, and with a population of lively and determined business men, Rustler bids fair in the coming year to be worthy of her name.”

“Who said “afraid”? We’re not hurt. Hear us whistle. But I’m sorry Heckler let that into his correspondence,’ he added, with a momentary frown. ‘Some of our Topaz citizens might miss the fun of it, and go over to Rustler to wait for the Three C.’s. Coming in the fall, is it? Oh, dear! Oh, dear, dear, dear! This is

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the way they amuse themselves while they dangle their legs over Big Chief Mountain and wait for it:—

“Our merchants have responded to the recent good feeling which has pervaded the town since word came that President Mutrie, on his return to Denver, was favourably considering the claims of Rustler. Robbins has his front windows prettily decorated and filled with fancy articles. His store seems to be the most popular for the youngsters who have a nickel or two to spend.”

‘I should murmur! Won’t you like to see the Three C.’s come sailing into Topaz one of these fine mornings, little girl?’ asked Tarvin suddenly, as he seated himself on the sofa beside her, and opened out the paper so that she could look over his shoulder.

‘Would you like it, Nick?’

‘Would I!’

‘Then, of course, I should. But I think you will be better off if it doesn’t. It will make you too rich. See father.’

‘Well, I’d put on the brakes if I found myself getting real rich. I’ll stop just after I’ve passed the Genteel Poverty Station. Isn’t it good to see the old heading again—Heckler’s name as large as life just under “oldest paper in Divide County,” and Heckler’s fist sticking out all over a rousing editorial on the prospects of the town? Home-like, isn’t it? He’s got two columns of new advertising; that shows what the town’s doing. And look at the good old “ads.” from the Eastern agencies. How they take you back! I never expected to thank Heaven for a Castoria advertisement; did you, Kate? But I swear it makes me feel good all over. I’ll read the patient inside if you say much.’

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Kate smiled. The paper gave her a little pang of home-sickness too. She had her own feeling for Topaz; but what reached her through the 'Telegram's' lively pages was the picture of her mother sitting in her kitchen in the long afternoons (she had sat in the kitchen so long in the poor and wandering days of the family that she did it now by preference), gazing sadly out at white-topped Big Chief, and wondering what her daughter was doing at that hour. Kate remembered well that afternoon hour in the kitchen when the work was done. She recalled from the section-house days the superannuated rocker, once a parlour chair, which her mother had hung with skins and told off for kitchen service. Kate remembered with starting tears that her mother had always wanted her to sit in it, and how good it had been to see from her own hassock next the oven the little mother swallowed up in its deeps. She heard the cat purring under the stove, and the kettle singing; the clock ticked in her ear, and the cracks between the boards in the floor of the hastily built section-house blew the cold prairie air against her heels.

She gazed over Tarvin's shoulder at the two cuts of Topaz which appeared in every issue of the 'Telegram' —the one representing the town in its first year, the other the town of to-day—and a lump rose in her throat.

'Quite a difference, isn't there?' said Tarvin, following her eye. 'Do you remember where your father's tent used to stand, and the old section-house, just here by the river?' He pointed, and Kate nodded without speaking. 'Those were good days, weren't they? Your father wasn't as rich as he is now, and neither was I; but we were all mighty happy together.'

Kate's thought drifted back to that time, and called

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up other visions of her mother expending her slight frame in many forms of hard work. The memory of the little characteristic motion with which she would shield with raised hand the worn young old face when she would be broiling above an open fire, or frying doughnuts, or lifting the stove lid, forced her to gulp down the tears. The simple picture was too clear, even to the light of the fire on the face, and the pink light shining through the frail hand.

'Hello!' said Tarvin, casting his eye up and down the columns, 'they've had to put another team on to keep the streets clean. We had one. Heckler don't forget the climate either. And they are doing well at the Mesa House. That's a good sign. The tourists will all have to stop over at Topaz when the new line comes through, and we have the right hotel. Some towns might think we had a little tourist traffic now. Here's Loomis dining fifty at the Mesa the other day—through express. They've formed a new syndicate to work the Hot Springs. Do you know, I shouldn't wonder if they made a town down there. Heckler's right. It will help Topaz. We don't mind a town that near. It makes a suburb of it.'

He marked his sense of the concession implied in letting him stay that evening by going early; but he did not go so early on the following evening, and as he showed no inclination to broach forbidden subjects, Kate found herself glad to have him there, and it became a habit of his to drop in, in the evenings, and to join the group that gathered, with open doors and windows, about the family lamp. In the happiness of seeing visible effects from her labours blossoming under her eyes, Kate regarded his presence less and less. Sometimes she would let him draw her out upon the veranda under the sumptuous

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Indian night—nights when the heat-lightning played like a drawn sword on the horizon, and the heavens hovered near the earth, and the earth was very still. But commonly they sat within, with the missionary and his wife, talking of Topaz, of the hospital, of the Maharaj Kunwar, of the dam, and sometimes of the Estes children at Bangor. For the most part, however, when the talk was among the group, it fell upon the infinitesimal gossip of a sequestered life, to the irritation and misery of Tarvin.

When the conversation lagged in these deeps he would fetch up violently with a challenge to Estes on the subject of the tariff or silver legislation, and after that the talk was at least lively. Tarvin was, by his training, largely a newspaper-educated man. But he had also been taught at first hand by life itself, and by the habit of making his own history; and he used the hairy fist of horse-sense in dealing with the theories of newspaper politics and the systems of the schools.

Argument had no allurements for him, however; it was with Kate that he talked when he could, and oftenest, of late, of the hospital, since her progress there had begun to encourage her. She yielded at last to his entreaties to be allowed to see this paragon, and to look for himself upon the reforms she had wrought.

Matters had greatly improved since the days of the lunatic and the ‘much-esteemed woman,’ but only Kate knew how much remained to be done. The hospital was at least clean and sweet if she inspected it every day, and the people in their fashion were grateful for kinder tending and more skilful treatment than they had hitherto dreamed of. Upon each cure a rumour went abroad through the country-side of a new power in the land, and

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other patients came; or the convalescent herself would bring back a sister, a child, or a mother with absolute faith in the power of the White Fairy to make all whole. They could not know all the help that Kate brought in the train of her quiet movements, but for what they knew they blessed her as they lay. Her new energy swept even Dhunpat Rai along the path of reform. He became curious in the lime-washing of stonework, the disinfecting of wards, the proper airing of bed-linen, and even the destruction by fire of the bedsteads, once his perquisite, on which smallpox patients had died. Native-like, he worked best for a woman with the knowledge that there was an energetic white man in the background. Tarvin's visit, and a few cheery words addressed to him by that capable outsider, supplied him with this knowledge.

Tarvin could not understand the uncouth talk of the out-patients, and did not visit the women's wards; but he saw enough to congratulate Kate unreservedly. She smiled contentedly. Mrs. Estes was sympathetic, but in no way enthusiastic; and it was good to be praised by Nick, who had found so much to blame in her project.

'It's clean and it's wholesome, little girl,' he said, peering and sniffing; 'and you've done miracles with these jellyfish. If you'd been on the opposition ticket instead of your father I shouldn't be a member of the legislature.'

Kate never talked to him about that large part of her work which lay among the women of the Maharajah's palace. Little by little she learned her way about such portions of the pile as she was permitted to traverse. From the first she had understood that the palace was ruled by one Queen, of whom the women spoke under their breath, and whose lightest word, conveyed by the mouth of a grinning child, set the packed mazes hum-

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ming. Once only had she seen this Queen, glimmering like a tiger-beetle among a pile of kincob cushions—a lithe, black-haired young girl, it seemed, with a voice as soft as running water at night, and with eyes that had no shadow of fear in them. She turned lazily, the jewels clinking on ankle, arm, and bosom, and looked at Kate for a long time without speaking.

‘I have sent that I may see you,’ she said at last. ‘You have come here across the water to help these cattle?’

Kate nodded, every instinct in her revolting at the silver-tongued splendour at her feet.

‘You are not married?’ The Queen put her hands behind her head and looked at the painted peacocks on the ceiling.

Kate did not reply, but her heart was hot.

‘Is there any sickness here?’ she asked at last sharply. ‘I have much to do.’

‘There is none, unless it may be that you yourself are sick. There are those who sicken without knowing it.’

The eyes turned to meet Kate’s, which were blazing with indignation. This woman, lapped in idleness, had struck at the life of the Maharaj Kunwar; and the horror of it was that she was younger than herself.

‘Achcha,’ said the Queen, still more slowly, watching her face. ‘If you hate me so, why do you not say so? You white people love truth.’

Kate turned on her heel to leave the room. Sitabhai called her back for an instant, and, moved by some royal caprice, would have caressed her, but she fled indignant, and was careful never again to venture into that wing of the palace. None of the women there called for her services, and not once but several times, when she passed

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the mouth of the covered way that led to Sitabhai's apartments, she saw a little naked child flourishing a jewelled knife, and shouting round the headless carcass of a goat whose blood was flooding the white marble. 'That,' said the women, 'is the gipsy's son. He learns to kill daily. A snake is a snake, and a gipsy is a gipsy, till they are dead.'

There was no slaughter of goats, singing of songs, or twangling of musical instruments in the wing of the palace that made itself specially Kate's own. Here lived, forgotten by the Maharajah and mocked by Sitabhai's maidens, the mother of the Maharaj Kunwar. Sitabhai had taken from her—by the dark arts of the gipsies, so the Queen's adherents said; by her own beauty and knowledge in love, they sang in the other wing of the palace—all honour and consideration due to her as the Queen Mother. There were scores of empty rooms where once there had been scores of waiting-women, and those who remained with the fallen Queen were forlorn and ill-favoured. She herself was a middle-aged woman, by Eastern standards; that is to say, she had passed twenty five, and had never been more than ordinarily comely.

Her eyes were dull with much weeping, and her mind was full of superstitions—fears for every hour of the night and the day, and vague terrors, bred of loneliness, that made her tremble at the sound of a footfall. In the years of her prosperity she had been accustomed to perfume herself, put on her jewels, and with braided hair await the Maharajah's coming. She would still call for her jewels, attire herself as of old, and wait amid the respectful silence of her attendants till the long night gave way to the dawn, and the dawn showed the furrows on her cheeks. Kate had seen one such vigil, and perhaps

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showed in her eyes the wonder that she could not repress, for the Queen Mother fawned on her timidly after the jewels had been put away, and begged her not to laugh.

'You do not understand, Miss Kate,' she pleaded. 'There is one custom in your country and another in ours; but still you are a woman, and you will know.'

'But you know that no one will come,' Kate said tenderly.

'Yes, I know; but—no, you are not a woman, only a fairy that has come across the water to help me and mine.'

Here again Kate was baffled. Except in the message sent by the Maharaj Kunwar, the Queen Mother never referred to the danger that threatened her son's life. Again and again Kate had tried to lead up to the subject—to gain some hint, at least, of the nature of the plot.

'I know nothing,' the Queen would reply. 'Here behind the curtain no one knows anything. Miss Kate, if my own women lay dead out there in the sun at noon'—she pointed downwards through the tracery of her window to the flagged path below—'I should know nothing. Of what I said I know nothing; but surely it is allowed'—she lowered her voice to a whisper—'oh surely it is allowed to a mother to bid another woman look to her son. He is so old now that he thinks himself a man, and wanders far, and so young that he thinks the world will do him no harm. Ahi! And he is so wise that he knows a thousand times more than I. He speaks English like an Englishman. How can I control him with my little learning and my very great love? I say to you, Be good to my son. That I can say aloud, and write it upon a wall, if need were. There is no harm in that. But if I said more, look you, the plaster between the stones be-

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neath me would gape to suck it in, and the wind would blow all my words across to the villages. I am a stranger here—a Rajputni from Kulu, a thousand thousand koss away. They bore me here in a litter to be married—in the dark they bore me for a month; and except that some of my women have told me, I should not know which way the home-wind blows when it goes to Kulu. What can a strange cow do in the byre? May the Gods witness!’

‘Ah, but tell me what you think?’

‘I think nothing,’ the Queen would answer sullenly. ‘What have women to do with thinking? They love and they suffer. I have said all that I may say. Miss Kate, some day you will bear a little son. As you have been good to my son, so may the Gods be good to yours when that time comes, and you know how the heart is full of love.’

‘If I am to protect him, I must know. You leave me in the dark.’

‘And I also am in the dark—and the darkness is full of danger.’

Tarvin himself was much about the palace, not only because he perceived that it was there he might most hopefully keep his ear to the ground for news of the Naulahka, but because it enabled him to observe Kate’s comings and goings, and with his hand ready for a rapid movement to his pistol-pocket.

His gaze followed her at these times, as at others, with the longing look of the lover; but he said nothing, and Kate was grateful to him. It was a time, as it seemed to him, to play the part of that Tarvin who had carried water for her long ago at the end of the section; it was a

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time to stand back, to watch, to guard, but not to trouble her.

The Maharaj Kunwar came often under his eye, and he was constantly inventing amusing things for him to do remote from Sitabhai's courtyard; but the boy would occasionally break away, and then it was Tarvin's task to go after him and make sure that he came to no harm. One afternoon when he had spent some time in coaxing the child away, and had finally resorted to force, much to the child's disgust, a twelve-foot baulk of teakwood, as he was passing out under an arch in process of repair, crashed down from the scaffolding just in front of Fibby's nose. The horse retired into the courtyard on his hind legs, and Tarvin heard the rustle of the women behind the shutters.

He reflected on the incurable slackness of these people, stopped to swear at the workmen crouched on the scaffolding in the hollow of the arch, and went on. They were no less careless about the dam—it was in the blood, he supposed—for the headman of a coolie gang who must have crossed the Amet twenty times, showed him a new ford across a particularly inviting channel, which ended in a quicksand; and when Tarvin had flung himself clear, the gang spent half the day in hauling Fibby out with ropes. They could not even build a temporary bridge without leaving the boards loose, so that a horse's hoof found its way between; and the gangs seemed to make a point of letting bullock-carts run down the steep embankments into the small of Tarvin's back, when, at infrequent intervals, that happened to be turned.

Tarvin was filled with great respect for the British Government, which worked on these materials, and began to understand the mild-faced melancholy and deci-

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sive views of Lucien Estes about the native population, as well as to sympathise more keenly than ever with Kate.

This curious people were now, he learned with horror, to fill the cup of their follies by marrying the young Maharaj Kunwar to a three-year-old babe, brought from the Kulu hills, at vast expense, to be his bride. He sought out Kate at the missionary's, and found her quivering with indignation. She had just heard.

'It's like them to waste a wedding where it isn't wanted,' said Tarvin soothingly. Since he saw Kate excited, it became his part to be calm. 'Don't worry your overworked head about it, Kate. You are trying to do too much, and you are feeling too much. You will break down before you know it, from sheer exhaustion of the chord of sympathy.'

'Oh no!' said Kate. 'I feel quite strong enough for anything that may come. I mustn't break down. Think of this marriage coming on. The Maharaj will need me more than ever. He has just told me that he won't get any sleep for three days and three nights while their priests are praying over him.'

'Crazy! Why, it's a quicker way of killing him than Sitabhai's. Heavens! I daren't think of it. Let's talk of something else. Any papers from your father lately? This kind of thing makes Topaz taste sort of good.'

She gave him a package received by the last post, and he fell silent as he ran his eye hastily over a copy of the 'Telegram' six weeks old; but he seemed to find little comfort in it. His brows knitted.

'Pshaw!' he exclaimed with irritation, 'this won't do!'

'What is it?'

'Heckler bluffing about the Three C.'s, and not doing

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it well. That isn't like Jim. He talks about it as a sure thing as hard as if he didn't believe in it, and had a private tip from somewhere that it wasn't coming after all. I've no doubt he has. But he needn't give it away to Rustler like that. Let's look at the real estate transfers. Ah! that tells the story,' he exclaimed excitedly, as his eye rested on the record of the sale of a parcel of lots on G Street. 'Prices are going down—away, 'way down. The boys are caving. They're giving up the fight.' He leaped up and marched about the room nervously. 'Heavens! if I could only get word to them!'

'Why—what, Nick? What word do you want to send them?'

He pulled himself up instantly.

'To let them know that I believe in it,' he said. 'To get them to hold on.'

'But suppose the road doesn't come to Topaz after all. How can you know, away off here in India?'

'Come to Topaz, little girl!' he shouted. 'Come to Topaz! It's coming if I have to lay the rails!'

But the news about the temper of the town vexed and disconcerted him notwithstanding, and after he left Kate that night he sent a cable to Heckler, through Mrs. Mutrie, desiring her to forward the despatch from Denver, as if that were the originating office of the message.

'Heckler, Topaz.—Take a brace, for God's sake. Got dead cinch on Three C.'s. Trust me, and boom like.—Tarvin.'

XIV

Because I sought it far from men,
 In deserts and alone;
I found it burning overhead,
 The jewel of a throne.

Because I sought—I sought it so
 And spent my days to find—
It blazed one moment ere it left
 The blacker night behind.

‘The Crystals of Iswara.’

ACITY of tents had grown up in three days without the walls of Rhatore—a city greened with far-brought lawns of turf, and stuck about with hastily transplanted orange-trees, wooden lamp-posts painted in gaudy colours, and a cast-iron fountain of hideous design. Many guests were expected at Rhatore to grace the marriage of the Maharaj Kunwar—barons, princes, thakurs, lords of waste fortresses and of hopeless crags of the north and the south, fiefs from the fat, poppy-blazoned plains of Mewar, and brother rajahs of the King. They came accompanied by their escorts, horse and foot.

In a land where genealogies, to be respectable, must run back without a break for eight hundred years, it is a delicate matter not to offend; and all were desperately

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jealous of the place and precedence of their neighbours in the camp. Lest the task should be too easy, the household bards of the princes came with them, and squabbled with the court officials of Gokral Seetarun. Behind the tents stretched long lines of horse-pickets, where the fat pink-and-blue-spotted stallions neighed and squealed at one another, under their heavy velvet trappings all day long; and the ragged militia of twenty tiny native states smoked and gambled among their saddles or quarrelled at the daily distribution of food furnished by the generosity of the Maharajah. From hundreds of miles about, vagrant and mendicant priests of every denomination had flocked into the city, and their salmon-coloured raiment, black blankets, or ash-smeared nudity gave Tarvin many minutes of untrammelled entertainment as he watched them roaming fearlessly from tent to tent, their red eyes rolling in their heads, alternately threatening or fawning for gifts. The rest-house, as Tarvin discovered, was crammed with fresh contingents of commercial travellers. His Highness was not likely to pay at such a season, but fresh orders would be plentiful. The city itself was brilliant with coats of pink-and-white lime-wash, and the main streets were obstructed with the bamboo scaffoldings of fireworks. Every house-front was swept and newly luted with clean mud, and the doorways were hung with marigolds and strings of jasmine-buds. Through the crowds tramped the sweating sweetmeat-dealers, vendors of hawks, dealers in cheap jewellery and glass bracelets and little English mirrors, while camels loaded with wedding gifts of far-off kings, ploughed through the crowd, or the mace-bearers of the State cleared a path with their silver staves for the passage of the Maharajah's carriages. Forty barouches were

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in use, and, as long as horse-flesh held out, or harness could be patched with string, it did not beseem the dignity of the State to provide less than four horses to each. As these horses were untrained, and as the little native boys, out of sheer lightness of heart, touched off squibs and crackers at high noon, the streets were animated.

The hill on which the palace stood seemed to smoke like a volcano, for the little dignitaries came without cessation, each expecting the salute of cannon due to his rank. Between the roars of the ordnance strains of uncouth music would break from the red walls, and presently some officer of the court would ride out of one of the gates, followed by all his retinue, each man gorgeous as a cock-pheasant in spring, his moustache fresh oiled and curled fiercely over his ears; or one of the royal elephants, swathed in red velvet and bullion from shoulder to ankle, would roll out under the weight of his silver howdah, and trumpet till the streets were cleared for his passage. Seventy elephants were fed daily by the King—no mean charge, since each beast consumed as much green fodder daily as he could carry on his back, as well as thirty or forty pounds of flour. Now and again one of the monsters, maddened by the noise and confusion, and by the presence of strange rivals, would be overtaken with paroxysms of blind fury. Then he would be hastily stripped of his trappings, bound with ropes and iron chains, hustled out of the city between two of his fellows, and tied down half a mile away by the banks of the Amet, to scream and rage till the horses in the neighbouring camp broke their pickets and stampeded wildly among the tents. Pertab Singh, commandant of his Highness's body-guard, was in his glory. Every hour of the day gave him excuse for charging with his troop on mysteri-

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ous but important errands between the palace and the tents of the princes. The formal interchange of visits alone occupied two days. Each prince with his escort would solemnly drive to the palace, and half an hour later the silver state barouche and the Maharajah himself, jewelled from head to heel, would return the visit, while the guns gave word of the event to the city of houses and to the city of tents.

When night fell on the camp there was no silence till near the dawn, for strolling players, singers of songs, and tellers of stories, dancing girls, brawny Oudh wrestlers, and camp followers beyond counting, wandered from tent to tent making merry. When these had departed, the temples in the city sent forth the hoarse cries of conchs, and Kate, listening, seemed to hear in every blast the wail of the little Maharaj Kunwar, who was being prepared for his marriage by interminable prayers and purifications. She saw as little of the boy as Tarvin did of the King. In those days every request for an audience was met with, ‘He is with his priests.’ Tarvin cursed all the priests of Rhatore, and condemned to every variety of perdition the hang-dog fakirs that prowled about his path.

‘I wish to goodness they’d come to a point with this fool business,’ he said to himself. ‘I haven’t got a century to spend in Rhatore.’

After nearly a week of uninterrupted clamour, blazing sunshine, and moving crowds clad in garments the colours of which made Tarvin’s eyes ache, there arrived, by the same road that had borne Kate to the city, two carriages containing five Englishmen and three English-women, who, later, walked about the city with lack-lustre eyes, bored by the official duty which compelled them to

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witness in the hot weather a crime which it was not only beyond them to hinder, but to which they were obliged to lend their official patronage.

The Agent to the Governor-General—that is to say, the official representative of the Viceroy in Rajputana—had some time before represented to the Maharajah that he might range himself in the way of progress and enlightenment by ordering that his son should not be given in marriage for another ten years. The Maharajah, pleading the immemorial custom of his land and the influence of the priests, gilded his refusal by a generous donation to a woman's hospital in Calcutta which was not in want of funds.

For his own part, Tarvin could not comprehend how any government could lend its countenance to this wicked farce, calling itself a marriage, which was presently to be played out with the assistance of two children. He was presently introduced to the Agent of the Governor-General, who was anxious to learn more about the damming of the Amet. To be asked about the damming of the Amet, when he was making no more progress than at present with the Naulahka, seemed to Tarvin, however, the last touch of insult, and he was not communicative, asking the Agent, instead, a number of urgent questions about the approaching infamy at the palace. The Agent declaring the marriage to be a political necessity, the destination suggested by Tarvin for political necessities of this sort caused the official to stiffen, and to look this wild American up and down with startled curiosity. They parted on poor terms.

With the rest of the party Tarvin was more at ease. The Agent's wife, a tall brunette, belonging to one of those families which from the earliest days of the East

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India Company have administered the fortunes of India, solemnly inspected Kate's work at the hospital; and being only a woman, and not an official, was attracted, and showed that she was attracted, by the sad-eyed little woman who did not talk about her work. Therefore Tarvin devoted himself to the amusement and entertainment of the Agent's wife, and she pronounced him an extraordinary person. 'But, then, all Americans are extraordinary, you know, though they're so clever.'

Not forgetting in the midst of this tumultuous pageant that he was a citizen of Topaz, Tarvin told her about that blessed city of the plain, away off there under the Sauguache Range, where half his heart lay. He called it 'the magic city,' implying that the dwellers of the Western continent had agreed to call it so by general consent. She was not bored; she enjoyed it. Talk of land and improvement companies, boards of trade, town lots, and the Three C.'s was fresh to her, and it became easy to lead up to what Tarvin actually had in mind. What about the Naulahka? Had she ever seen it? He asked these questions boldly.

No; she knew nothing of the Naulahka. Her thoughts were bounded by the thought of going home in the spring. Home for her meant a little house near Surbiton, close to the Crystal Palace, where her three-year-old boy was waiting for her; and the interests of the other English men and women seemed equally remote from Rajputana—not to mention the Naulahka. It was only inferentially that Tarvin could gather that they had spent the greater part of their working lives within the limits of the country. They talked as gipsies might talk by the roadside a little before the horses are put into the caravan. The ways were hot, they implied, and very dusty;

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and they hoped one day to be able to rest. The wedding was only one more weary incident on the line of march, and they devoutly wished it over. One of them even envied Tarvin for coming to the State with his fresh eye and his lively belief in the possibility of getting something out of the land beside a harvest of regrets.

The last day of the marriage ceremonies began and ended with more cannon, more fireworks, more clattering of hoofs, more trumpeting of elephants, and with the clamour of bands trying to play 'God Save the Queen.' The Maharaj Kunwar was to appear in the evening (in an Indian state wedding the bride is neither mentioned nor seen) at a banquet where the Agent of the Governor-General would propose his health and that of his father. The Maharaj was to make a speech in his best English. A court scribe had already composed a long oration to be used by his father. Tarvin was beginning seriously to doubt whether he should ever see the child alive again; and, before the banquet, rode out into the seething city to reconnoitre. It was twilight, and the torches were flaring between the houses. Wild outlanders from the desert, who had never seen a white man before, caught his horse by the bridle, examined him curiously, and with a grunt let him pass. The many-coloured turbans showed under the flickering light like the jewels of a broken necklace, and all the white housetops were crowded with the veiled figures of women. In half an hour the Maharaj Kunwar would make his way from the royal temple to the banqueting-tent at the head of a procession of caparisoned elephants.

Tarvin forced his way inch by inch through the dense crowd that waited at the foot of the temple steps. He merely wished to satisfy himself that the child was well;

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he wanted to see him come from the temple. As he looked about him he saw that he was the only white man in the crowd, and pitied his jaded acquaintances, who could find no pleasure in the wild scene under his eyes.

The temple doors were closed, and the torchlight flashed back from the ivory and silver with which they were inlaid. Somewhere out of sight stood the elephants, for Tarvin could hear their deep breathing and an occasional squeal above the hum of the crowd. Half a troop of cavalry, very worn and dusty with the day's labours, were trying to clear an open space before the temple, but they might as well have tried to divide a rainbow. From the roofs of the houses the women were throwing flowers, sweetmeats, and coloured rice into the crowd, while small bards, not yet attached to the house of any prince, chanted aloud in praise of the Maharajah, the Maharaj Kunwar, the Viceroy, the Agent of the Governor-General, Colonel Nolan, and any one else who might possibly reward praise with pence. One of these men, recognising Tarvin, struck up a chant in his honour. He had come, said the song, from a far country to dam an ungovernable river, and fill the country-side with gold; his step was like the step of a dromedary in the spring; his eye terrible as that of an elephant; and the graces of his person such that the hearts of all the women of Rhatore turned to water when he rode upon the public way. Lastly, he would reward the singer of this poor song with untold generosity, and his name and fame should endure in the land so long as the flag of Gokral Seetarun had five colours, or as long as the Naulahka adorned the throat of kings.

Then, with an ear-splitting shriek of conchs, the temple doors opened inward, and the voices of the crowd were hushed into a whisper of awe. Tarvin's hands

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tightened on the reins of his horse, and he leaned forward to stare. The opened doors of the temple framed a square of utter darkness, and to the screeching of the conchs was added a throbbing of innumerable drums. A breath of incense, strong enough to make him cough, drifted across the crowd, which were absolutely silent now.

The next moment the Maharaj Kunwar, alone and unattended, came out of the darkness, and stood in the torchlight with his hands on the hilt of his sword. The face beneath the turban, draped with loops of diamonds under an emerald aigrette, was absolutely colourless. There were purple circles about his eyes, and his mouth was half open; but the pity Tarvin felt for the child's weariness was silenced by a sudden thrill and leap of his heart, for on the gold cloth of the Maharaj Kunwar's breast lay the Naulahka.

There was no need, this time, to ask any questions. It was not he who saw it; its great deep eyes seemed to fall on him. It blazed with the dull red of the ruby, the angry green of the emerald, the cold blue of the sapphire, and the white, hot glory of the diamond. But dulling all these glories was the superb radiance of one gem that lay above the great carved emerald on the central clasp. It was the black diamond—black as the pitch of the infernal lake, and lighted from below with the fires of hell.

The thing lay on the boy's shoulders, a yoke of flame. It outshone the silent Indian stars above, turned the tossing torches to smears of dull yellow, and sucked the glitter from the cloth of gold on which it lay.

There was no time to think, to estimate, to appraise, scarcely a moment even to realise, for the conchs suddenly wailed again, the Maharaj stepped back into the darkness, and the doors of the temple were shut.

XV

From smallpox and the Evil Eye, a wasteful marriage-feast, and the kindness of my co-wife, may the Gods protect my son.—Hindu Proverb.

TARVIN made his way to the banquet with his face aflame and his tongue dry between his teeth. He had seen it. It existed. It was not a myth. And he would have it; he would take it back with him. Mrs. Mutrie should hang it about the sculptured neck that looked so well when she laughed; and the Three C.'s should come to Topaz. He would be the saviour of his town; the boys at home would take the horses out of his carriage and drag him up Pennsylvania Avenue with their own hands; and town lots would sell next year in Topaz by the running inch.

It was worth all the waiting, worth the damming of a hundred rivers, worth a century of pachisi playing, and a thousand miles of bullock-cart. As he drained a glass to the health of the young Maharaj Kunwar at the banquet that evening, he renewed his pledge to himself to fight it out on this line if it took all summer. His pride of success had lain low of late, and taken many hurts; but now that he had seen his prize he esteemed it already within his grasp, as he had argued at Topaz that Kate must be his because he loved her.

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Next morning he woke with a confused notion that he stood on the threshold of great deeds; and then, in his bath, he wondered whence he had plucked the certainty and exultation of the night before. He had, indeed, seen the Naulahka. But the temple doors had closed on the vision. He found himself asking whether either temple or necklace had been real, and in the midst of his wonder and excitement was half way to the city before he knew that he had left the rest-house. When he came to himself, however, he knew well whither he was going and what he was going for. If he had seen the Naulahka he meant to keep it in sight. It had disappeared into the temple. To the temple, therefore, he would go.

Fragments of burnt-out torches lay on the temple steps among trampled flowers and spilt oil, and the marigold garlands hung limp and wilted on the fat shoulders of the black stone bulls that guarded the inner court. Tarvin took off his white pith helmet (it was very hot, though it was only two hours after dawn), pushed back the scanty hair from his high forehead, and surveyed the remnants of yesterday's feast. The city was still asleep after its holiday. The doors of the building were wide open, and he ascended the steps and walked in, with none to hinder.

The formless, four-faced god Iswara, standing in the centre of the temple, was smeared and discoloured with stains of melted butter, and the black smoke of exhausted incense. Tarvin looked at the figure curiously, half expecting to find the Naulahka hung about one of its four necks. Behind him, in the deeper gloom of the temple, stood other divinities, many-handed and many-headed, tossing their arms aloft, protruding their tongues, and grinning at one another. The remains of many sac-

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rifices lay about them, and in the half light Tarvin could see that the knees of one were dark with dried blood. Overhead the dark roof ran up into a Hindu dome, and there was the soft rustle and scratch of nesting bats.

Tarvin, with his hat on the back of his head and his hands in his pockets, gazed at the image, looking about him and whistling softly. He had been a month in India, but he had not yet penetrated to the interior of a temple. Standing there, he recognised with fresh force how entirely the life, habits, and traditions of this strange people alienated them from all that seemed good and right to him; and he was vaguely angered to know that it was the servants of these horrors who possessed a necklace which had power to change the destiny of a Christian and civilised town like Topaz.

He knew that he would be expelled without ceremony for profanation, if discovered, and made haste to finish his investigations, with a half-formed belief that the slovenliness of the race might have caused them to leave the Naulahka about somewhere, as a woman might leave her jewels on her dressing-table after a late return from a ball the night before. He peered about and under the gods, one by one, while the bats squeaked above him. Then he returned to the central image of Iswara, and in his former attitude regarded the idol.

It occurred to him that, though he was on level ground, most of his weight was resting on his toes, and he stepped back to recover his balance. The slab of sandstone he had just quitted rolled over slowly, as a porpoise rolls in the still sea, revealing for an instant a black chasm below. Then it shouldered up into its place again without a sound, and Tarvin wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. If he had found the Naulahka at that instant he

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would have smashed it in pure rage. He went out into the sunlight once more, devoting the country where such things were possible to its own gods; he could think of nothing worse.

A priest, sprung from an unguessable retreat, came out of the temple immediately afterward, and smiled upon him.

Tarvin, willing to renew his hold on the wholesome world in which there were homes and women, betook himself to the missionary's cottage, where he invited himself to breakfast. Mr. and Mrs. Estes had kept themselves strictly aloof from the marriage ceremony, but they could enjoy Tarvin's account of it, delivered from the Topaz point of view. Kate was unfeignedly glad to see him. She was full of the discreditable desertion of Dhunpat Rai and the hospital staff from their posts. They had all gone to watch the wedding festivities, and for three days had not appeared at the hospital. The entire work of the place had devolved on herself and the wild woman of the desert who was watching her husband's cure. Kate was very tired, and her heart was troubled with misgivings for the welfare of the little Prince, which she communicated to Tarvin when he drew her out upon the veranda after breakfast.

'I'm sure he wants absolute rest now,' she said, almost tearfully. 'He came to me at the end of the dinner last night—I was in the women's wing of the palace—and cried for half an hour. Poor little baby! It's cruel.'

'Oh, well, he'll be resting to-day. Don't worry.'

'No; to-day they take his bride back to her own people again, and he has to drive out with the procession or something—in this sun, too. It's very wicked. Doesn't it ever make your head ache, Nick? I sometimes think

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of you sitting out on that dam of yours, and wonder how you can bear it.'

'I can bear a good deal for you, little girl,' returned Tarvin, looking down into her eyes.

'Why, how is that for me, Nick?'

'You'll see if you live long enough,' he assured her; but he was not anxious to discuss his dam, and returned to the safer subject of the Maharaj Kunwar.

Next day and the day after he rode aimlessly about in the neighbourhood of the temple, not caring to trust himself within its walls again, but determined to keep his eye upon the first and last spot where he had seen the Naulahka. There was no chance at present of getting speech with the only living person, save the King, whom he definitely knew had touched the treasure. It was maddening to await the reappearance of the Maharaj Kunwar in his barouche, but he summoned what patience he could. He hoped much from him; but meanwhile he often looked in at the hospital to see how Kate fared. The traitor Dhunpat Rai and his helpers had returned; but the hospital was crowded with cases from the furthest portions of the State—fractures caused by the King's reckless barouches, and one or two cases, new in Kate's experience, of men drugged, under the guise of friendship, for the sake of the money they carried with them, and left helpless in the public ways.

Tarvin, as he cast his shrewd eye about the perfectly kept men's ward, humbly owned to himself that, after all, she was doing better work in Rhatore than he. She at least did not run a hospital to cover up deeper and darker designs, and she had the inestimable advantage over him of having her goal in sight. It was not snatched from her after one maddening glimpse; it was not the

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charge of a mysterious priesthood, or of an impalpable State; it was not hidden in treacherous temples, nor hung round the necks of vanishing infants.

One morning, before the hour at which he usually set out for the dam, Kate sent a note over to him at the rest-house asking him to call at the hospital as soon as possible. For one rapturous moment he dreamed of impossible things. But smiling bitterly at his readiness to hope, he lighted a cigar, and obeyed the order.

Kate met him on the steps, and led him into the dispensary.

She laid an eager hand on his arm. ‘Do you know anything about the symptoms of hemp-poisoning?’ she asked him.

He caught her by both hands quickly, and stared wildly into her face. ‘Why? Why? Has any one been daring—?’

She laughed nervously. ‘No, no. It isn’t me. It’s him.’

‘Who?’

‘The Maharaj—the child. I’m certain of it now.’ She went on to tell him how, that morning, the barouche, the escort, and a pompous native had hurried up to the missionary’s door bearing the almost lifeless form of the Maharaj Kunwar; how she had at first attributed the attack, whatever it might be, to exhaustion consequent upon the wedding festivities; how the little one had roused from his stupor, blue-lipped and hollow-eyed, and had fallen from one convulsion into another, until she had begun to despair; and how, at the last, he had dropped into a deep sleep of exhaustion, when she had left him in the care of Mrs. Estes. She added that Mrs. Estes had believed that the young prince was suffering from a re-

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turn of his usual malady; she had seen him in paroxysms of this kind twice before Kate came.

'Now look at this,' said Kate, taking down the chart of her hospital cases, on which were recorded the symptoms and progress of two cases of hemp-poisoning that had come to her within the past week.

'These men,' she said, 'had been given sweetmeats by a gang of travelling gipsies, and all their money was taken from them before they woke up. Read for yourself.'

Tarvin read, biting his lips. At the end he looked up at her sharply.

'Yes,' he said, with an emphatic nod of his head—'yes. Sitabhai?'

'Who else would dare?' answered Kate passionately.

'I know. I know. But how to stop her going on! how to bring it home to her!'

'Tell the Maharajah,' responded Kate decidedly.

Tarvin took her hand. 'Good! I'll try it. But there's no shadow of proof, you know.'

'No matter. Remember the boy. Try. I must go back to him now.'

The two returned to the house of the missionary together, saying very little on the way. Tarvin's indignation that Kate should be mixed up in this miserable business almost turned to anger at Kate herself, as he rode beside her; but his wrath was extinguished at sight of the Maharaj Kunwar. The child lay on a bed in an inner room at the missionary's, almost too weak to turn his head. As Kate and Tarvin entered, Mrs. Estes rose from giving him his medicine, said a word to Kate by way of report, and returned to her own work. The child was clothed only in a soft muslin coat; but his sword and jewelled belt lay across his feet.

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'Salaam, Tarvin Sahib,' he murmured. 'I am very sorry that I was ill.'

Tarvin bent over him tenderly. 'Don't try to talk, little one.'

'Nay; I am well now,' was the answer. 'Soon we will go riding together.'

'Were you very sick, little man?'

'I cannot tell. It is all dark to me. I was in the palace laughing with some of the dance-girls. Then I fell. And after that I remember no more till I came here.'

He gulped down the cooling draught that Kate gave him, and resettled himself on the pillows, while one wax-yellow hand played with the hilt of his sword. Kate was kneeling by his side, one arm under the pillow supporting his head; and it seemed to Tarvin that he had never before done justice to the beauty latent in her good, plain, strong features. The trim little figure took softer outlines, the firm mouth quivered, the eyes were filled with a light that Tarvin had never seen before.

'Come to the other side—so,' said the child, beckoning Tarvin in the native fashion, by folding all his tiny fingers into his palms rapidly and repeatedly. Tarvin knelt obediently on the other side of the couch. 'Now I am a king, and this is my court.'

Kate laughed musically in her delight at seeing the boy recovering strength. Tarvin slid his arm under the pillow, found Kate's hand there, and held it.

The portiere at the door of the room dropped softly. Mrs. Estes had stolen in for a moment, and imagined that she saw enough to cause her to steal out again. She had been thinking a great deal since the days when Tarvin first introduced himself.

The child's eyes began to grow dull and heavy, and

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Kate would have withdrawn her arm to give him another draught.

'Nay; stay so,' he said imperiously; and relapsing into the vernacular, muttered thickly—'Those who serve the King shall not lack their reward. They shall have villages free of tax—three, five villages; Sujjain, Amet, and Gungra. Let it be entered as a free gift when they marry. They shall marry, and be about me always—Miss Kate and Tarvin Sahib.'

Tarvin did not understand why Kate's hand was withdrawn swiftly. He did not know the vernacular as she did.

'He is getting delirious again,' said Kate, under her breath. 'Poor, poor little one!'

Tarvin ground his teeth, and cursed Sitabhai between them. Kate was wiping the damp forehead, and trying to still the head as it was thrown restlessly from side to side. Tarvin held the child's hands, which closed fiercely on his own, as the boy was racked and convulsed by the last effects of the hemp.

For some minutes he fought and writhed, calling upon the names of many gods, striving to reach his sword, and ordering imaginary regiments to hang those white dogs to the beams of the palace gate, and to smoke them to death.

Then the crisis passed, and he began to talk to himself and to call for his mother.

The vision of a little grave dug in the open plain sloping to the river, where they had laid out the Topaz cemetery, rose before Tarvin's memory. They were lowering Heckler's first baby into it, in its pine coffin; and Kate, standing by the grave-side, was writing the child's name on the finger's length of smoothed pine which was to be its only headstone.

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‘Nay, nay, nay!’ wailed the Maharaj Kunwar. ‘I am speaking the truth; and oh, I was so tired at that pagal-dance¹ in the temple, and I only crossed the court-yard. . . . It was a new girl from Lucknow; she sang the song of “The Green Pulse of Mundore.” . . Yes; but only some almond curd. I was hungry, too. A little white almond curd, mother. Why should I not eat when I feel inclined? Am I a sweeper’s son, or a prince? Pick me up! pick me up! It is very hot inside my head. . . . Louder. I do not understand. Will they take me over to Kate? She will make all well. What was the message?’ The child began to wring his hands despairingly. ‘The message! The message! I have forgotten the message. No one in the State speaks English as I speak English. But I have forgotten the message.

‘Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Framed thy fearful symmetry?

Yes, mother; till she cries. I am to say the whole of it till she cries. I will not forget; I did not forget the first message. By the great god Har! I have forgotten this message.’ And he began to cry.

Kate, who had watched so long by bedsides of pain, was calm and strong; she soothed the child, speaking to him in a low, quieting voice, administering a sedative draught, doing the right thing, as Tarvin saw, surely and steadily, undisturbed. It was he who was shaken by the agony that he could not alleviate.

¹Fool-dance.

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The Maharaj Kunwar drew a long, sobbing breath, and contracted his eyebrows.

‘Mahadeo ki jai!’ he shouted. ‘It has come back. “A gipsy has done this. A gipsy has done this.” And I was to say it until she cried.’

Kate half rose, with an awful look at Tarvin. He returned it, and, nodding, strode from the room, dashing the tears from his eyes.

XVI

Heart of my heart, is it meet or wise
To warn a King of his enemies?
We know what Heaven or Hell may bring,
But no man knoweth the mind of the King.

‘The Ballad of the King’s Jest.’

‘WANT to see the Maharajah.’
‘He cannot be seen.’
‘I shall wait until he comes.’
‘He will not be seen all day.’
‘Then I shall wait all day.’

Tarvin settled himself comfortably in his saddle, and drew up in the centre of the courtyard, where he was wont to confer with the Maharajah.

The pigeons were asleep in the sunlight, and the little fountain was talking to itself, as a pigeon coos before settling to its nest. The white marble flagging glared like hot iron, and waves of heat flooded him from the green-shaded walls. The guardian of the gate tucked himself up in his sheet again and slept. And with him slept, as it seemed, the whole world in a welter of silence as intense as the heat. Tarvin’s horse champed his bit, and the echoes of the ringing iron tinkled from side to side of the courtyard. The man himself whipped a silk handkerchief round his neck as some slight protection against the peeling sunbeams, and, scorning the shade

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of the archway, waited in the open that the Maharajah might see there was an urgency in his visit.

In a few minutes there crept out of the stillness a sound like the far-off rustle of wind across a wheat-field on a still autumn day. It came from behind the green shutters, and with its coming Tarvin mechanically straightened himself in the saddle. It grew, died down again, and at last remained fixed in a continuous murmur, for which the ear strained uneasily—such a murmur as heralds the advance of a loud racing tide in a nightmare when the dreamer cannot flee nor declare his terror in any voice but a whisper. After the rustle came the smell of jasmine and musk that Tarvin knew well.

The palace wing had wakened from its afternoon siesta, and was looking at him with a hundred eyes. He felt the glances that he could not see, and they filled him with wrath as he sat immovable, while the horse swished at the flies. Somebody behind the shutters yawned a polite little yawn. Tarvin chose to regard it as an insult, and resolved to stay where he was till he or the horse dropped. The shadow of the afternoon sun crept across the courtyard inch by inch, and wrapped him at last in stifling shade.

There was a muffled hum—quite distinct from the rustle—of voices within the palace. A little ivory inlaid door opened, and the Maharajah rolled into the courtyard. He was in the ugliest muslin undress, and his little saffron-coloured Rajput turban was set awry on his head, so that the emerald plume tilted drunkenly. His eyes were red with opium, and he walked as a bear walks when he is overtaken by the dawn in the poppy-field, where he has gorged his fill through the night watches.

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Tarvin's face darkened at the sight, and the Mahārajah, catching the look, bade his attendants stand back out of ear-shot.

'Have you been waiting long, Tarvin Sahib?' he asked huskily, with an air of great good-will. 'You know I see no man at this afternoon hour, and—and they did not bring me the news.'

'I can wait,' said Tarvin composedly.

The King seated himself in the broken Windsor chair, which was splitting in the heat, and eyed Tarvin suspiciously.

'Have they given you enough convicts from the jails? Why are you not on the dam, then, instead of breaking my rest? By God! is a King to have no peace because of you and such as you?'

Tarvin let this outburst go by without comment.

'I have come to you about the Maharaj Kunwar,' he said quietly.

'What of him?' said the Mahārajah quickly. 'I—I—have not seen him for some days.'

'Why?' asked Tarvin bluntly.

'Affairs of state and urgent political necessity,' murmured the King, evading Tarvin's wrathful eyes. 'Why should I be troubled by these things, when I know that no harm has come to the boy?'

'No harm!'

'How could harm arrive?' The voice dropped into an almost conciliatory whine. 'You yourself, Tarvin Sahib, promised to be his true friend. That was on the day you rode so well, and stood so well against my body-guard. Never have I seen such riding, and therefore why should I be troubled? Let us drink.'

He beckoned to his attendants. One of them came

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forward with a long silver tumbler concealed beneath his flowing garments, and poured into it an allowance of liqueur brandy that made Tarvin, used to potent drinks, open his eyes. The second man produced a bottle of champagne, opened it with a skill born of long practice, and filled up the tumbler with the creaming wine.

The Maharajah drank deep, and wiped the foam from his beard, saying apologetically—‘Such things are not for political agents to see; but you, Sahib, are true friend of the State. Therefore I let you see. Shall they mix you one like this?’

‘Thanks. I didn’t come here to drink. I came to tell you that the Maharaj has been very ill.’

‘I was told there was a little fever,’ said the King, leaning back in his chair. ‘But he is with Miss Sheriff, and she will make all well. Just a little fever, Tarvin Sahib. Drink with me.’

‘A little hell! Can you understand what I am saying? The little chap has been half poisoned.’

‘Then it was the English medicines,’ said the Maharajah, with a bland smile. ‘Once they made me very sick, and I went back to the native hakims. You are always making funny talks, Tarvin Sahib.’

With a mighty effort Tarvin choked down his rage, and tapped his foot with his riding-whip, speaking very clearly and distinctly—‘I haven’t come here to make funny talk to-day. The little chap is with Miss Sheriff now. He was driven over there; and somebody in the palace has been trying to poison him with hemp.’

‘Bhang!’ said the Maharajah stupidly.

‘I don’t know what you call the mess, but he has been poisoned. But for Miss Sheriff he would have died—

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your first son would have died. He has been poisoned—do you hear, Maharajah Sahib?—and by some one in the palace.'

'He has eaten something bad, and it has made him sick,' said the King surlily. 'Little boys eat anything. By God! no man would dare to lay a finger on my son.'

'What would you do to prevent it?'

The Maharajah half rose to his feet, and his red eyes filled with fury. 'I would tie him to the forefoot of my biggest elephant, and kill him through an afternoon!' Then he relapsed, foaming, into the vernacular, and poured out a list of the hideous tortures that were within his will but not in his power to inflict. 'I would do all these things to any man who touched him,' he concluded.

Tarvin smiled incredulously.

'I know what you think,' stormed the King, maddened by the liquor and the opium. 'You think that because there is an English government I can make trials only by law, and all that nonsense. Stuff! What do I care for the law that is in books? Will the walls of my palace tell anything that I do?'

'They won't. If they did, they might let you know that it is a woman inside the palace who is at the bottom of this.'

The Maharajah's face turned gray under its brown. Then he burst forth anew, almost huskily—'Am I a king or a potter that I must have the affairs of my zenana dragged into the sunlight by any white dog that chooses to howl at me? Go out, or the guard will drive you out like a jackal.'

'That's all right,' said Tarvin calmly. 'But what has it to do with the Prince, Maharajah Sahib? Come over to Mr. Estes' and I'll show you. You've had some ex-

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perience of drugs, I suppose. You can decide for yourself. The boy has been poisoned.'

'It was an accursed day for my State when I first allowed the missionaries to come, and a worse day when I did not drive you out.'

'Not in the least. I'm here to look after the Maharaj Kunwar, and I'm going to do it. You prefer leaving him to be killed by your women.'

'Tarvin Sahib, do you know what you say?'

'Shouldn't be saying it if I didn't. I have all the proof in my hands.'

'But when there is a poisoning there are no proofs of any kind, least of all when a woman poisons! One does justice on suspicion, and by the English law it is a most illiberal policy to kill on suspicion. Tarvin Sahib, the English have taken away from me everything that a Rajput desires, and I and the others are rolling in idleness like horses that never go to exercise. But at least I am master there!'

He waved a hand toward the green shutters, and spoke in a lower key, dropping back into his chair, and closing his eyes.

Tarvin looked at him despairingly.

'No one man would dare—no man would dare,' murmured the Maharajah more faintly. 'And as for the other thing that you spoke of, it is not in your power. By God! I am a Rajput and a king. I do not talk of the life behind the curtain.'

Then Tarvin took his courage in both hands and spoke.

'I don't want you to talk,' he said; 'I merely want to warn you against Sitabhai. She's poisoning the Prince.'

The Maharajah shuddered. That a European should mention the name of his queen was in itself sufficient

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insult, and one beyond all his experience. But that a European should cry aloud in the open courtyard a charge such as Tarvin had just made surpassed imagination. The Maharajah had just come from Sitabhai, who had lulled him to rest with songs and endearments sacred to him alone; and here was this lean outlander assailing her with vile charges. But for the drugs he would, in the extremity of his rage, have fallen upon Tarvin, who was saying, 'I can prove it quite enough to satisfy Colonel Nolan.'

The Maharajah stared at Tarvin with shiny eyes, and Tarvin thought for a moment that he was going to fall in a fit; but it was the drink and the opium reasserting their power upon him. He mumbled angrily. The head fell forward, the words ceased, and he sat in his chair breathing heavily, as senseless as a log.

Tarvin gathered up his reins, and watched the sodden monarch for a long time in silence, as the rustle behind the shutters rose and fell. Then he turned to go, and rode out through the arch, thinking.

Something sprang out of the darkness where the guard slept, and where the King's fighting apes were tethered; and the horse reared as a gray ape, its chain broken at the waist-band, flung itself on the pommel of the saddle, chattering. Tarvin felt and smelt the beast. It thrust one paw into the horse's mane, and with the other encircled his own throat. Instinctively he reached back, and before the teeth under the grimy blue gums had time to close he had fired twice, pressing the muzzle of the pistol into the hide. The creature rolled off to the ground, moaning like a human being, and the smoke of the two shots drifted back through the hollow of the arch and dissolved in the open courtyard.

XVII

Strangers drawn from the ends of the earth, jewelled and plumed were we;
I was the Lord of the Inca Race, and she was the Queen of the Sea.
Under the stars beyond our stars where the reinless meteors glow,
Hotly we stormed Valhalla, a million years ago.
Dust of the stars was under our feet, glitter of stars above—
Wrecks of our wrath dropped reeling down as we fought and we spurned and we strove;
Worlds upon worlds we tossed aside, and scattered them to and fro,
The night that we stormed Valhalla, a million years ago.
She with the star I had marked for my own—I with my set desire—
Lost in the loom of the Night of Nights, 'wilder'd by worlds afire—
Met in a war 'twixt love and hate where the reinless meteors glow,
Hewing our way to Valhalla, a million years ago.

‘The Sack of the Gods.’

IN summer the nights of the desert are hotter than the days, for when the sun goes down, earth, masonry, and marble give forth their stored heat, and the low clouds, promising rain and never bringing it, allow nothing to escape.

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Tarvin was lying at rest in the veranda of the rest-house, smoking a cheroot and wondering how far he had bettered the case of the Maharaj Kunwar by appealing to the Maharajah. His reflections were not disturbed; the last of the commercial travellers had gone back to Calcutta and Bombay, grumbling up to the final moment of their stay, and the rest-house was all his own. Surveying his kingdom, he meditated, between the puffs of his cheroot, on the desperate and apparently hopeless condition of things. They had got to the precise point where he liked them. When a situation looked as this one did, only Nicholas Tarvin could put it through and come out on top. Kate was obdurate; the Naulahka was damnably coy; the Maharajah was ready to turn him out of the State. Sitabhai had heard him denounce her. His life was likely to come to a sudden and mysterious end, without so much as the satisfaction of knowing that Heckler and the boys would avenge him; and if it went on, it looked as though it would have to go on without Kate, and without the gift of new life to Topaz—in other words, without being worth the trouble of living.

The moonlight, shining on the city beyond the sands, threw fantastic shadows on temple spires and the watch-towers along the walls. A dog in search of food snuffed dolefully about Tarvin's chair, and withdrew to howl at him at a distance. It was a singularly melancholy howl. Tarvin smoked till the moon went down in the thick darkness of an Indian night. She had scarcely set when he was aware of something blacker than the night between him and the horizon.

'Is it you, Tarvin Sahib?' the voice inquired in broken English.

Tarvin sprang to his feet before replying. He was

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beginning to be a little suspicious of fresh apparitions. His hand went to his hip-pocket. Any horror, he argued, might jump out at him from the darkness in a country managed on the plan of a Kiralfy trick spectacle.

'Nay; do not be afraid,' said the voice. 'It is I—Juggut Singh.'

Tarvin pulled thoughtfully at his cigar. 'The State is full of Singhs,' he said. 'Which?'

'I, Juggut Singh, of the household of the Maharajah.'

'H'm. Does the King want to see me?'

The figure advanced a pace nearer.

'No, Sahib; the Queen.'

'Which?' repeated Tarvin.

The figure was in the veranda at his side, almost whispering in his ear. 'There is only one who would dare to leave the palace. It is the Gipsy.'

Tarvin snapped his fingers blissfully and soundlessly in the dark, and made a little click of triumph with his tongue. 'Pleasant calling hours the lady keeps,' he said.

'This is no place for speaking, Sahib. I was to say, "Come, unless you are afraid of the dark."'

'Oh, were you? Well, now, look here, Juggut; let's talk this thing out. I'd like to see your friend Sitabhai. Where are you keeping her? Where do you want me to go?'

'I was to say, "Come with me." Are you afraid?' The man spoke this time at his own prompting.

'Oh, I'm afraid fast enough,' said Tarvin, blowing a cloud of smoke from him. 'It isn't that.'

'There are horses—very swift horses. It is the Queen's order. Come with me.'

Tarvin smoked on, unhurrying; and when he finally

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picked himself out of the chair it was muscle by muscle. He drew his revolver from his pocket, turned the chambers slowly one after another to the vague light, under Juggut Singh's watchful eye, and returned it to his pocket again, giving his companion a wink as he did so.

'Well, come on, Juggut,' he said, and they passed behind the rest-house to a spot where two horses, their heads enveloped in cloaks to prevent them from neighing, were waiting at their pickets. The man mounted one, and Tarvin took the other silently, satisfying himself before getting into the saddle that the girths were not loose this time. They left the city road at a walking pace by a cart-track leading to the hills.

'Now,' said Juggut Singh, after they had gone a quarter of a mile in this fashion, and were alone under the stars; 'we can ride.'

He bowed forward, struck his stirrups home, and began lashing his animal furiously. Nothing short of the fear of death would have made the pampered eunuch of the palace ride at this pace. Tarvin watched him roll in the saddle, chuckled a little, and followed.

'You wouldn't make much of a cow-puncher, Juggut, would you?'

'Ride!' gasped Juggut Singh. 'For the cleft between the two hills—ride!'

The dry sand flew behind their horses' hoofs, and the hot winds whistled about their ears as they headed up the easy slope toward the hills, three miles from the palace. In the old days, before the introduction of telegraphs, the opium speculators of the desert were wont to telegraph the rise and fall in the price of the drug from little beacon-towers on the hills. It was toward one of these disused stations that Juggut Singh was straining.

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The horses fell into a walk as the slope grew steeper, and the outline of the squat-domed tower began to show clear against the sky. A few moments later Tarvin heard the hoofs of their horses ring on solid marble, and saw that he was riding near the edge of a great reservoir, full of water to the lip.

Eastward, a few twinkling lights in the open plain showed the position of Rhatore, and took him back to the night when he had said good-bye to Topaz from the rear platform of a Pullman. Night-fowl called to one another from the weeds at the far end of the tank, and a great fish leaped at the reflection of a star.

'The watch-tower is at the further end of the dam,' said Juggut Singh. 'The Gipsy is there.'

'Will they never have done with that name?' uttered an incomparably sweet voice out of the darkness. 'It is well that I am of a gentle temper, or the fish would know more of thee, Juggut Singh.'

Tarvin checked his horse with a jerk, for almost under his bridle stood a figure enveloped from head to foot in a mist of pale yellow gauze. It had started up from behind the red tomb of a once famous Rajput cavalier who was supposed by the country-side to gallop nightly round the dam he had built. This was one of the reasons why the Dungar Talao was not visited after nightfall.

'Come down, Tarvin Sahib,' said the voice mockingly in English. 'I, at least, am not a gray ape. Juggut Singh, go wait with the horses below the watch-tower.'

'Yes, Juggut; and don't go to sleep,' enjoined Tarvin — 'we might want you.' He alighted, and stood before the veiled form of Sitabhai.

'Shekand,' she said, after a little pause, putting out a hand that was smaller even than Kate's. 'Ah, Sahib,

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I knew that you would come. I knew that you were not afraid.'

She held his hand as she spoke, and pressed it tenderly. Tarvin buried the tiny hand deep in his engulfing paw, and, pressing it in a grip that made her give an involuntary cry, shook it with a hearty motion.

'Happy to make your acquaintance,' he said, as she murmured under her breath, 'By Indur, he has a hold!'

'And I am pleased to see you, too,' she answered aloud. Tarvin noted the music of the voice. He wondered what the face behind the veil might look like.

She sat down composedly on the slab of the tomb, motioning him to a seat beside her.

'All white men like straight talk,' she said, speaking slowly, and with uncertain mastery of English pronunciation. 'Tell me, Tarvin Sahib, how much you know.'

She withdrew her veil as she spoke, and turned her face toward him. Tarvin saw that she was beautiful. The perception thrust itself insensibly between him and his other perceptions about her.

'You don't want me to give myself away, do you, Queen?'

'I do not understand. But I know you do not talk like the other white men,' she said sweetly.

'Well, then, you don't expect me to tell you the truth?'

'No,' she replied. 'Else you would tell me why you are here. Why do you give me so much trouble?'

'Do I trouble you?'

Sitabhai laughed, throwing back her head, and clasping her hands behind her neck. Tarvin watched her curiously in the starlight. All his senses were alert; he was keenly on his guard, and he cast a wary eye about and behind him from time to time. But he could see

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nothing but the dull glimmer of the water that lapped at the foot of the marble steps, and hear nothing save the cry of the night-owls.

'O Tarvin Sahib,' she said. 'You know! After the first time I was sorry.'

'Which time was that?' inquired Tarvin vaguely.

'Of course it was when the saddle turned. And then when the timber fell from the archway I thought at least that I had maimed your horse. Was he hurt?'

'No,' said Tarvin, stupefied by her engaging frankness.

'Surely you knew,' she said almost reproachfully.

He shook his head. 'No, Sitabhai, my dear,' he said slowly and impressively. 'I wasn't on to you, and it's my eternal shame. But I'm beginning to sabe. You worked the little business at the dam, too, I suppose, and the bridge and the bullock-carts. And I thought it was their infernal clumsiness? Well, I'll be—' He whistled melodiously, and the sound was answered by the hoarse croak of a crane across the reeds.

The Queen leaped to her feet, thrusting her hand into her bosom. 'A signal!' Then sinking back upon the slab of the tomb, 'But you have brought no one with you. I know you are not afraid to go alone.'

'Oh, I'm not trying to do you up, young lady,' he answered. 'I'm too busy admiring your picturesque and systematic deviltry. So you're at the bottom of all my troubles? That quicksand trick was a pretty one. Do you often work it?'

'Oh, on the dam!' exclaimed the Queen, waving her hands lightly. 'I only gave them orders to do what they could. But they are very clumsy people—only coolie-people. They told me what they had done, and I was angry.'

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‘Kill any one?’

‘No; why should I?’

‘Well, if it comes to that, why should you be so hot on killing me?’ inquired Tarvin dryly.

‘I do not like any white men to stay here, and I knew that you had come to stay.’ Tarvin smiled at the unconscious Americanism. ‘Besides,’ she went on, ‘the Maharajah was fond of you, and I had never killed a white man. Then, too, I like you.’

‘Oh!’ responded Tarvin expressively.

‘By Malang Shah, and you never knew!’ She was swearing by the god of her own clan—the god of the gipsies.

‘Well, don’t rub it in,’ said Tarvin.

‘And you killed my big pet ape,’ she went on. ‘He used to salaam to me in the mornings like Luchman Rao, the prime minister. Tarvin Sahib, I have known many Englishmen. I have danced on the slack-rope before the mess-tents of the officers on the line of march, and taken my little begging gourd up to the big bearded colonel when I was no higher than his knee.’ She lowered her hand to within a foot of the ground. ‘And when I grew older,’ she continued, ‘I thought that I knew the hearts of all men. But, by Malang Shah, Tarvin Sahib, I never saw a man like unto you! Nay,’ she went on almost beseechingly, ‘do not say that you did not know. There is a love-song in my tongue, “I have not slept between moon and moon because of you”; and indeed for me that song is quite true. Sometimes I think that I did not quite wish to see you die. But it would be better that you were dead. I, and I alone, command this State. And now, after that which you have told the King—’

‘Yes? You heard, then?’

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She nodded. ‘After that I cannot see that there is any other way—unless you go away.’

‘I’m not going,’ said Tarvin.

‘That is good,’ said the Queen, with a little laugh. ‘And so I shall not miss seeing you in the courtyard day by day. I thought the sun would have killed you when you waited for the Maharajah. Be grateful to me, Tarvin Sahib, for I made the Maharajah come out. And you did me a bad turn.’

‘My dear young lady,’ said Tarvin earnestly, ‘if you’d pull in your wicked little fangs, no one wants to hurt you. But I can’t let you beat me about the Maharaj Kunwar. I’m here to see that the young man stays with us. Keep off the grass, and I’ll drop it.’

‘Again I do not understand,’ said the Queen, bewildered. ‘But what is the life of a little child to you who are a stranger here?’

‘What is it to me? Why, it’s fair play; it’s the life of a little child. What more do you want? Is nothing sacred to you?’

‘I also have a son,’ returned the Queen, ‘and he is not weak. Nay, Tarvin Sahib, the other child always was sickly from his birth. How can he govern men? My son will be a Rajput; and in the time to come—But that is no concern of the white men. Let this little one go back to the gods!’

‘Not if I know it,’ responded Tarvin decisively.

‘Otherwise,’ swept on the Queen, ‘he will live infirm and miserable for ninety years. I know the bastard Kulu stock that he comes from. Yes; I have sung at the gate of his mother’s palace when she and I were children—I in the dust, and she in her marriage-litter. To-day she is in the dust. Tarvin Sahib’—her voice

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melted appealingly—‘I shall never bear another son; but I may at least mould the State from behind the curtain, as many queens have done. I am not a palace-bred woman. Those’—she pointed scornfully toward the lights of Rhatore—‘have never seen the wheat wave, or heard the wind blow, or sat in a saddle, or talked face to face with men in the streets. They call me the gipsy, and they cower under their robes like fat slugs when I choose to lift my hand to the Maharajah’s beard. Their bards sing of their ancestry for twelve hundred years. They are noble, forsooth! By Indur and Allah—yes, and the God of your missionaries too—their children and the British Government shall remember me for twice twelve hundred years. Ahi, Tarvin Sahib, you do not know how wise my little son is. I do not let him go to the missionary’s. All that he shall need afterward—and indeed it is no little thing to govern this State—he shall learn from me; for I have seen the world, and I know. And until you came all was going so softly, so softly, to its end! The little one would have died—yes; and there would have been no more trouble. And never man nor woman in the palace would have breathed to the King one word of what you cried aloud before the sun in the courtyard. Now, suspicion will never cease in the King’s mind, and I do not know—I do not know —’ She bent forward earnestly. ‘Tarvin Sahib, if I have spoken one word of truth this night, tell me how much is known to you.’

Tarvin preserved absolute silence. She stole one hand pleadingly on his knee. ‘And none would have suspected. When the ladies of the Viceroy came last year, I gave out of my own treasures twenty-five thousand rupees to the nursing hospital, and the lady sahib

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kissed me on both cheeks, and I talked English, and showed them how I spent my time knitting—I who knit and unknit the hearts of men.'

This time Tarvin did not whistle; he merely smiled and murmured sympathetically. The large and masterly range of her wickedness, and the coolness with which she addressed herself to it, gave her a sort of distinction. More than this, he respected her for the personal achievement which of all feats most nearly appeals to the breast of the men of the West—she had done him up. It was true her plans had failed; but she had played them all on him without his knowledge. He almost revered her for it.

'Now you begin to understand,' said Sitabhai; 'there is something more to think of. Do you mean to go to Colonel Nolan, Sahib, with all your story about me?'

'Unless you keep your hands off the Maharaj Kunwar—yes,' said Tarvin, not allowing his feelings to interfere with business.

'That is very foolish,' said the Queen; 'because Colonel Nolan will give much trouble to the King, and the King will turn the palace into confusion, and every one of my handmaids, except a few, will give witness against me; and I perhaps shall come to be much suspected. Then you would think, Tarvin Sahib, that you had prevented me. But you cannot stay here for ever. You cannot stay here until I die. And so soon as you are gone—' She snapped her fingers.

'You won't get the chance,' said Tarvin unshakenly. 'I'll fix that. What do you take me for?'

The Queen bit the back of her forefinger irresolutely. There was no saying what this man, who strode unharmed through her machinations, might or might not be able to do. Had she been dealing with one of her

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own race she would have played threat against threat. But the perfectly composed and loose-knit figure by her side, watching every movement, chin in hand, ready, alert, confident, was an unknown quantity that baffled and distressed her.

There was a sound of a discreet cough, and Juggut Singh waddled toward them, bowing abjectly to whisper something to the Queen. She laughed scornfully, and motioned him back to his post.

'He says the night is passing,' she explained, 'and it is death for him and for me to be without the palace.'

'Don't let me keep you,' said Tarvin, rising. 'I think we understand each other.' He looked into her eyes. 'Hands off!'

'Then I may not do what I please?' she said, 'and you will go to Colonel Nolan to-morrow?'

'That depends,' said Tarvin, shutting his lips. He thrust his hands into his pockets as he stood looking down at her.

'Seat yourself again a moment, Tarvin Sahib,' said Sitabhai, patting the slab of the tomb invitingly with her little palm. Tarvin obeyed. 'Now, if I let no more timber fall, and keep the gray apes tied fast—'

'And dry up the quicksands in the Amet River,' pursued Tarvin grimly. 'I see. My dear little spitfire, you are at liberty to do what you like. Don't let me interfere with your amusements.'

'I was wrong, I should have known that nothing would make you afraid,' said she, eyeing him thoughtfully out of the corner of her eye; 'and, excepting you, Tarvin Sahib, there is no man that I fear. If you were a king as I a queen, we would hold Hindustan between our two hands.'

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She clasped his locked fist as she spoke, and Tarvin, remembering that sudden motion to her bosom when he had whistled, laid his own hand quickly above hers, and held them fast.

'Is there nothing, Tarvin Sahib, that would make you leave me in peace? What is it you care for? You did not come here to keep the Maharaj Kunwar alive.'

'How do you know I didn't?'

'You are very wise,' she said, with a little laugh, 'but it is not good to pretend to be too wise. Shall I tell you why you came?'

'Well, why did I? Speak up.'

'You came here, as you came to the temple of Iswara, to find that which you will never find, unless'—she leaned toward him—'I help you. Was it very cold in the Cow's Mouth, Tarvin Sahib?'

Tarvin drew back, frowning, but not betraying himself further.

'I was afraid that the snakes would have killed you there?'

'Were you?'

'Yes,' she said softly. 'And I was afraid, too, that you might not have stepped swiftly enough for the turning stone in the temple.'

Tarvin glanced at her. 'No?'

'Yes. Ah! I knew what was in your mind, even before you spoke to the King—when the bodyguard charged.'

'See here, young woman, do you run a private inquiry agency?'

She laughed. 'There is a song in the palace now about your bravery. But the boldest thing was to speak to the King about the Naulahka. He told me all you said.'

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But he—even he did not dream that any feringhi could dare to covet it. And I was so good—I did not tell him. But I knew men like you are not made for little things. Tarvin Sahib,’ she said, leaning close, releasing her hand and laying it softly on his shoulder, ‘you and I are kin indeed! For it is more easy to govern this State—ay, and from this State to recapture all Hindustan from these white dogs, the English—than to do what you have dreamed of. And yet a stout heart makes all things easy. Was it for yourself, Tarvin Sahib, that you wanted the Naulahka, or for another—even as I desire Gokral Seetarun for my son? We are not little people. It is for another, is it not?’

‘Look here,’ said Tarvin reverently, as he took her hand from his shoulder and held it firmly in his clutch again, ‘are there many of you in India?’

‘But one. I am like yourself—alone.’ Her chin drooped against his shoulder, and she looked up at him out of her eyes as dark as the lake. The scarlet mouth and the quivering nostrils were so close to his own that the fragrant breath swept his cheek.

‘Are you making states, Tarvin Sahib, like me? No; surely it is a woman. Your government is decreed for you, and you do what it orders. I turned the canal which the Government said should run through my orange-garden, even as I will bend the King to my will, even as I will kill the boy, even as I will myself rule in Gokral Seetarun through my child. But you, Tarvin Sahib—you wish only a woman! Is it not so? And she is too little to bear the weight of the Luck of the State. She grows paler day by day.’ She felt the man quiver, but he said nothing.

From the tangle of scrub and brushwood at the far

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end of the lake broke forth a hoarse barking cough that filled the hills with desolation as water brims a cup. Tarvin leaped to his feet. For the first time he heard the angry complaint of the tiger going home to his lair after a fruitless night of ranging.

‘It is nothing,’ said the Queen, without stirring. ‘It is only the tiger of the Dungar Talao. I have heard them howling many times when I was a gipsy, and even if he came you would shoot him, would you not, as you shot the ape?’

She nestled close to him, and, as he sank beside her on the stone again, his arm slipped unconsciously about her waist.

The shadow of the beast drifted across an open space by the lake-shore as noiselessly as thistle-down draws through the air of summer, and Tarvin’s arm tightened in its resting-place—tightened on a bossed girdle that struck cold on his palm through many folds of muslin.

‘So little and so frail—how could she wear it?’ resumed the Queen.

She turned a little in his embrace, and Tarvin’s arm brushed against one, and another, and then another, strand of the girdle, studded like the first with irregular bosses, till under his elbow he felt a great square stone.

He started, and tightened his hold about her waist, with paling lips.

‘But we two,’ the Queen went on, in a low voice, regarding him dreamily, ‘could make the kingdom fight like the water-buffaloes in spring. Would you be my prime minister, Tarvin Sahib, and advise me through the curtain?’

‘I don’t know whether I could trust you,’ said Tarvin briefly.

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'I do not know whether I could trust myself,' responded the Queen; 'for after a time it might be that I should be servant who have always been queen. I have come near to casting my heart under the hoofs of your horse—not once, but many times.' She put her arms around his neck and joined them there, gazing into his eyes, and drawing his head down to hers. 'Is it a little thing,' she cooed, 'if I ask you to be my king? In the old days, before the English came, Englishmen of no birth stole the hearts of begums, and led their armies. They were kings in all but the name. We do not know when the old days may return, and we might lead our armies together.'

'All right. Keep the place open for me. I might come back and apply for it one of these days when I've worked a scheme or two at home.'

'Then you are going away—you will leave us soon?'

'I'll leave you when I've got what I want, my dear,' he answered, pressing her closer.

She bit her lip. 'I might have known,' she said softly. 'I, too, have never turned aside from anything I desired. Well, and what is it?'

The mouth drooped a little at the corners, as the head fell on his shoulder. Glancing down, he saw the ruby-jewelled jade handle of a little knife at her breast.

He disengaged himself from her arms with a quick movement, and rose to his feet. She was very lovely as she stretched her arms appealingly out to him in the half light; but he was there for other things.

Tarvin looked at her between the eyes, and her glance fell.

'I'll take what you have around your waist, please.'

'I might have known that the white man thinks only of money!' she cried scornfully.

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She unclasped a silver belt from her waist and threw it from her, clinking, upon the marble.

Tarvin did not give it a glance.

'You know me better than that,' he said quietly. 'Come, hold up your hands. Your game is played.'

'I do not understand,' she said. 'Shall I give you some rupees?' she asked scornfully. 'Be quick, Juggut Singh is bringing the horses.'

'Oh, I'll be quick enough. Give me the Naulahka.'

'The Naulahka?'

'The same. I'm tired of tipsy bridges and ungirt horses and uneasy arches and dizzy quicksands. I want the necklace.'

'And I may have the boy?'

'No; neither boy nor necklace.'

'And will you go to Colonel Nolan in the morning?'

'The morning is here now. You'd better be quick.'

'Will you go to Colonel Nolan?' she repeated, rising and facing him.

'Yes; if you don't give me the necklace.'

'And if I do?'

'No. Is it a trade?' It was his question to Mrs. Mutrie.

The Queen looked desperately at the day-star that was beginning to pale in the east. Even her power over the King could not save her from death if the day discovered her beyond the palace walls.

The man spoke as one who held her life in the hollow of his hand; and she knew he was right. If he had proof he would not scruple to bring it before the Maharajah; and if the Maharajah believed—Sitabhai could feel the sword at her throat. She would be no founder of a dynasty, but a nameless disappearance in the palace.

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Mercifully, the King had not been in a state to understand the charges Tarvin had brought against her in the courtyard. But she lay open now to anything this reckless and determined stranger might choose to do against her. At the least he could bring upon her the formless suspicion of an Indian court, worse than death to her plans, and the removal of Maharaj Kunwar beyond her power, through the interposition of Colonel Nolan; and at the worst—But she did not pursue this train of thought.

She cursed the miserable weakness of liking for him which had prevented her from killing him just now as he lay in her arms. She had meant to kill him from the first moment of their interview; she had let herself toy too long with the fascination of being dominated by a will stronger than her own, but there was still time.

‘And if I do not give you the Naulahka?’ she asked.

‘I guess you know best about that.’

As her eye wandered out on the plain she saw that the stars no longer had fire in them; the black water of the reservoir paled and grew gray, and the wild-fowl were waking in the reeds. The dawn was upon her, as merciless as the man. Juggut Singh was leading up the horses, motioning to her in an agony of impatience and terror. The sky was against her; and there was no help on earth.

She put her hands behind her. Tarvin heard the snap of a clasp, and the Naulahka lay about her feet in ripples of flame.

Without looking at him or the necklace, she moved toward the horses. Tarvin stooped swiftly and possessed himself of the treasure. Juggut Singh had released his horse. Tarvin strode forward and caught at the bridle, cramming the necklace into his breast-pocket.

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He bent to make sure of his girth. The Queen, standing behind her horse, waited an instant to mount.

'Good-bye, Tarvin Sahib; and remember the gipsy,' she said, flinging her arm out over the horse's withers. 'Heh!'

A flicker of light passed his eye. The jade handle of the Queen's knife quivered in the saddle-flap, half an inch above his right shoulder. His horse plunged forward at the Queen's stallion, with a snort of pain.

'Kill him, Juggut Singh!' gasped the Queen, pointing to Tarvin, as the eunuch scrambled into his saddle. 'Kill him!'

Tarvin caught her tender wrist in his fast grip. 'Easy there, girl! Easy!' She returned his gaze, baffled. 'Let me put you up,' he said.

He put his arms about her and swung her into the saddle.

'Now give us a kiss,' he said, as she looked down at him.

She stooped. 'No, you don't! Give me your hands.' He prisoned both wrists, and kissed her full upon the mouth. Then he smote the horse resoundingly upon the flank, and the animal blundered down the path and leaped out into the plain.

He watched the Queen and Juggut Singh disappear in a cloud of dust and flying stones, and turned with a deep sigh of relief to the lake. Drawing the Naulahka from its resting-place, and laying it fondly out upon his hands, he fed his eyes upon it.

The stones kindled with the glow of the dawn, and mocked the shifting colours of the hill. The shining ropes of gems put to shame the red glare that shot up from behind the reeds, as they had dulled the glare of

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the torches on the night of the little Prince's wedding. The tender green of the reeds themselves, the intense blue of the lake, the beryl of the flashing kingfishers, and the blinding ripples spreading under the first rays of the sun, as a bevy of coots flapped the water from their wings—the necklace abashed them all. Only the black diamond took no joy from the joy of the morning, but lay among its glorious fellows as sombre and red-hearted as the troubrous night out of which Tarvin had snatched it.

Tarvin ran the stones through his hands one by one, and there were forty-five of them—each stone perfect and flawless of its kind; nipped, lest any of its beauty should be hidden, by a tiny gold clasp, each stone swinging all but free from the strand of soft gold on which it was strung, and each stone worth a king's ransom or a queen's good name.

It was a good moment for Tarvin. His life gathered into it. Topaz was safe!

The wild duck were stringing to and fro across the lake, and the cranes called to one another, stalking through reeds almost as tall as their scarlet heads. From some temple hidden among the hills a lone priest chanted sonorously as he made the morning sacrifice to his god, and from the city in the plain came the boom of the first ward-drums, telling that the gates were open and the day was born.

Tarvin lifted his head from the necklace. The jade-handled knife was lying at his feet. He picked up the delicate weapon and threw it into the lake.

'And now for Kate,' he said.

XVIII

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
And the State is thus and thus:
Our legions wait at the palace gate—
Little it profits us,
Now we are come to our Kingdom!

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
The crown is ours to take—
With a naked sword at the council board,
And under the throne the Snake,
Now we are come to our Kingdom!

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
But my love's eyelids fall,
All that I wrought for, all that I fought for,
Delight her nothing at all.
My crown is of withered leaves,
For she sits in the dust and grieves,
Now we are come to our Kingdom!
‘King Anthony.’

THE palace on its red rock seemed to be still asleep as he cantered across the empty plain. A man on a camel rode out of one of the city gates at right angles to his course, and Tarvin noted with interest how swiftly a long-legged camel of the desert can move. Familiar as he had now become with the ostrich-necked

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beasts, he could not help associating them with Barnum's Circus and boyhood memories. The man drew near and crossed in front of him. Then, in the stillness of the morning, Tarvin heard the dry click of a voice he understood. 'It was the sound made by bringing up the cartridge of a repeating rifle. Mechanically he slipped from the saddle, and was on the other side of the horse as the rifle spoke, and a puff of blue smoke drifted up and hung motionless above the camel.

'I might have known she'd get in her work early,' he muttered, peering over his horse's withers. 'I can't drop him at this distance with a revolver. What's the fool waiting for?'

Then he perceived that, with characteristic native ineptitude, the man had contrived to jam his lever, and was beating it furiously on the forepart of the saddle. He remounted hastily, and galloped up, revolver in hand, to cover the blanched visage of Juggut Singh.

'You! Why, Juggut, old man, this isn't kind of you.'

'It was an order,' said Juggut, quivering with apprehension. 'It was no fault of mine. I—I do not understand these things.'

'I should smile. Let me show you.' He took the rifle from the trembling hand. 'The cartridge is jammed, my friend; it don't shoot as well that way. It only needs a little knack—so! You ought to learn it, Juggut.' He jerked the empty shell over his shoulder.

'What will you do to me?' cried the eunuch. 'She would have killed me if I had not come.'

'Don't you believe it, Juggut. She's a Jumbo at theory, but weak in practice. Go on ahead, please.'

They started back toward the city, Juggut leading the way on his camel, looking back apprehensively every

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minute. Tarvin smiled at him dryly but reassuringly, balancing on his hip the captured rifle. He observed that it was a very good rifle if properly used.

At the entrance to Sitabhai's wing of the palace, Juggut Singh dismounted and slunk into the courtyard, the livid image of fear and shame. Tarvin clattered after him, and as the eunuch was about to disappear through a door, called him back.

'You have forgotten your gun, Juggut,' he said. 'Don't be afraid of it.' Juggut was putting up a doubtful hand to take it from him. 'It won't hurt anybody this trip. Take yourself back to the lady, and tell her you are returned, with thanks.'

No sound came to his ear from behind the green shutters as he rode away, leaving Juggut staring after him. Nothing fell upon him from out of the arch, and the apes were tied securely. Sitabhai's next move was evidently yet to be played.

His own next move he had already reckoned with. It was a case for bolting.

He rode to the mosque outside the city, routed out his old friend in dove-coloured satin, and made him send this message:—

'Mrs. Mutrie, Denver.—Necklace is yours. Get throat ready and lay that track into Topaz.—Tarvin.'

Then he turned his horse's head toward Kate. He buttoned his coat tightly across his chest, and patted the resting-place of the Naulahka fondly, as he strode up the path to the missionary's veranda, when he had tethered Fibby outside. His high good humour with himself and the world spoke through his eyes as he greeted Mrs. Estes at the door.

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‘You have been hearing something pleasant,’ she said.
‘Won’t you come in?’

‘Well, either the pleasantest, or next to the pleasantest; I’m not sure which,’ he answered with a smile, as he followed her into the familiar sitting-room. ‘I’d like to tell you all about it, Mrs. Estes. I feel almighty like telling somebody. But it isn’t a healthy story for this neighbourhood.’ He glanced about him. ‘I’d hire the town crier and a few musical instruments and advertise it, if I had my way; and we’d all have a little Fourth of July celebration and a bonfire, and I’d read the Declaration of Independence over the natives with a relish. But it won’t do. There is a story I’d like to tell you, though,’ he added, with a sudden thought. ‘You know why I come here so much, don’t you, Mrs. Estes—I mean outside of your kindness to me, and my liking you all so much, and our always having such good times together? You know, don’t you?’

Mrs. Estes smiled. ‘I suppose I do,’ she said.

‘Well; that’s right! That’s right. I thought you did. Then I hope you’re my friend!’

‘If you mean that I wish you well, I do. But you can understand that I feel responsible for Miss Sheriff. I have sometimes thought I ought to let her mother know.’

‘Oh, her mother knows! She’s full of it. You might say she liked it. The trouble isn’t there, you know, Mrs. Estes.’

‘No. She’s a singular girl; very strong, very sweet. I’ve grown to love her dearly. She has wonderful courage. But I should like it better for her if she would give it up, and all that goes with it. She would be better married,’ she said meditatively.

Tarvin gazed at her admiringly. ‘How wise you are,

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Mrs. Estes! How wise you are!' he murmured. 'If I've told her that once I've told her a dozen times. Don't you think, also, that it would be better if she were married at once—right away, without too much loss of time?'

His companion looked at him to see if he was in earnest. Tarvin was sometimes a little perplexing to her. 'I think if you are clever you will leave it to the course of events,' she replied, after a moment. 'I have watched her work here, hoping that she might succeed where every one else has failed. But I know in my heart that she won't. There's too much against her. She's working against thousands of years of traditions, and training, and habits of life. Sooner or later they are certain to defeat her; and then, whatever her courage, she must give in. I've thought sometimes lately that she might have trouble very soon. There's a good deal of dissatisfaction at the hospital. Lucien hears some stories that make me anxious.'

'Anxious! I should say so. That's the worst of it. It isn't only that she won't come to me, Mrs. Estes—that you can understand—but she is running her head meanwhile into all sorts of impossible dangers. I haven't time to wait until she sees that point. I haven't time to wait until she sees any point at all but that this present moment now and here, would be a good moment in which to marry Nicholas Tarvin. I've got to get out of Rhatore. That's the long and the short of it, Mrs. Estes. Don't ask me why. It's necessary. And I must take Kate with me. Help me if you love her.'

To this appeal Mrs. Estes made the handsomest response in her power, by saying that she would go up and tell her that he wished to see her. This seemed to take

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some time; and Tarvin waited patiently, with a smile on his lips. He did not doubt that Kate would yield. In the glow of another success it was not possible to him to suppose that she would not come around now. Had he not the Naulahka? She went with it; she was indissolubly connected with it. Yet he was willing to impress into his service all the help he could get, and he was glad to believe that Mrs. Estes was talking to her.

It was an added prophecy of success when he found from a copy of a recent issue of the 'Topaz Telegram,' which he picked up while he waited, that the 'Lingering Lode' had justified his expectations. The people he had left in charge had struck a true fissure vein, and were taking out \$500 a week. He crushed the paper into his pocket, restraining an inclination to dance; it was perhaps safest on reflection to postpone that exercise until he had seen Kate. The little congratulatory whistle that he struck up instead, he had to sober a moment later into a smile as Kate opened the door and came in to him. There could be no two ways about it with her now. His smile, do what he would, almost said as much.

A single glance at her face showed him, however, that the affair struck her less simply. He forgave her; she could not know the source of his inner certitude. He even took time to like the gray house-dress, trimmed with black velvet, that she was wearing in place of the white which had become habitual to her.

'I'm glad you've dropped white for a moment,' he said, as he rose to shake hands with her. 'It's a sign. It represents a general abandonment and desertion of this blessed country; and that's just the mood I want to find you in. I want you to drop it, chuck it, throw it up.' He held her brown little hand in the swarthy fist

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he pushed out from his own white sleeve, and looked down into her eyes attentively.

‘What?’

‘India—the whole business. I want you to come with me?’ He spoke gently.

She looked up, and he saw in the quivering lines about her mouth signs of the contest on this theme she had passed through before coming down to him.

‘You are going? I’m so glad.’ She hesitated a moment. ‘You know why?’ she added, with what he saw was an intention of kindness.

Tarvin laughed as he seated himself. ‘I like that. Yes; I’m going,’ he said. ‘But I’m not going alone. You’re in the plan,’ he assured her, with a nod.

She shook her head.

‘No; don’t say that, Kate. You mustn’t. It’s serious this time.’

‘Hasn’t it always been?’ She sank into a chair. ‘It’s always been serious enough for me—that I couldn’t do what you wish, I mean. Not doing it—that is doing something else; the one thing I want to do—is the most serious thing in the world to me. Nothing has happened to change me, Nick. I would tell you in a moment if it had. How is it different for either of us?’

‘Lots of ways. But that I’ve got to leave Rhatore for a sample. You don’t think I’d leave you behind, I hope.’

She studied the hands she had folded in her lap for a moment. Then she looked up and faced him with her open gaze.

‘Nick,’ she said, ‘let me try to explain as clearly as I can how all this seems to me. You can correct me if I’m wrong.’

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‘Oh, you’re sure to be wrong!’ he cried; but he leaned forward.

‘Well, let me try. You ask me to marry you!’

‘I do,’ answered Tarvin solemnly. ‘Give me a chance of saying that before a clergyman, and you’ll see.’

‘I am grateful, Nick. It’s a gift—the highest, the best, and I’m grateful. But what is it you really want? Shall you mind my asking that, Nick? You want me to round out your life; you want me to complete your other ambitions. Isn’t that so? Tell me honestly, Nick; isn’t that so?’

‘No!’ roared Tarvin.

‘Ah, but it is! Marriage is that way. It is right. Marriage means that—to be absorbed into another’s life: to live your own, not as your own, but another’s. It is a good life. It’s a woman’s life. I can like it; I can believe in it. But I can’t see myself in it. A woman gives the whole of herself in marriage—in all happy marriages. I haven’t the whole of myself to give. It belongs to something else. And I couldn’t offer you a part; it is all the best men give to women, but from a woman it would do no man any good.’

‘You mean that you have the choice between giving up your work and giving up me, and that the last is easiest.’

‘I don’t say that; but suppose I did, would it be so strange? Be honest, Nick. Suppose I asked you to give up the centre and meaning of your life? Suppose I asked you to give up your work? And suppose I offered in exchange—marriage! No, no!’ She shook her head. ‘Marriage is good; but what man would pay that price for it?’

‘My dearest girl, isn’t that just the opportunity of women?’

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'The opportunity of the happy women—yes; but it isn't given to every one to see marriage like that. Even for women there is more than one kind of devotion.'

'Oh, look here, Kate! A man isn't an Orphan Asylum or a Home for the Friendless. You take him too seriously. You talk as if you had to make him your leading charity, and give up everything to the business. Of course you have to pretend something of the kind at the start, but in practice you only have to eat a few dinners, attend a semi-annual board meeting, and a strawberry festival or two to keep the thing going. It's just a general agreement to drink your coffee with a man in the morning, and be somewhere around, not too far from the fire, in not too ugly a dress, when he comes home in the evening. Come! It's an easy contract. Try me, Kate, and you'll see how simple I'll make it for you. I know about the other things. I understand well enough that you would never care for a life which didn't allow you to make a lot of people happy besides your husband. I recognise that. I begin with it. And I say that's just what I want. You have a talent for making folks happy. Well, I secure you on a special agreement to make me happy, and after you've attended to that, I want you to sail in and make the whole world bloom with your kindness. And you'll do it, too. Confound it, Kate, we'll do it! No one knows how good two people could be if they formed a syndicate and made a business of it. It hasn't been tried. Try it with me! O Kate, I love you, I need you, and if you'll let me, I'll make a life for you!'

'I know, Nick, you would be kind. You would do all that a man can do. But it isn't the man who makes marriages happy or possible; it's the woman, and it must be. I should either do my part and shirk the other, and

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then I should be miserable; or I should shirk you and be more miserable. Either way that happiness is not for me.'

Tarvin's hand found the Naulahka within his breast, and clutched it tight. Strength seemed to go out of it into him—strength to restrain himself from losing all by a dozen savage words.

'Kate, my girl,' he said quietly, 'we haven't time to conjure dangers. We have to face a real one. You are not safe here. I can't leave you in this place, and I've got to go. That is why I ask you to marry me at once?'

'But I fear nothing. Who would harm me?'

'Sitabhai,' he answered grimly. 'But what difference does it make? I tell you, you are not safe. Be sure that I know.'

'And you?'

'Oh, I don't count.'

'The truth, Nick!' she demanded.

'Well, I always said that there was nothing like the climate of Topaz.'

'You mean you are in danger—great danger, perhaps.'

'Sitabhai isn't going round hunting for ways to save my precious life, that's a fact.' He smiled at her.

'Then you must go away at once; you mustn't lose an hour. O Nick, you won't wait!'

'That's what I say. I can do without Rhatore; but I can't do without you. You must come.'

'Do you mean that if I don't you will stay?' she asked desperately.

'No; that would be a threat. I mean I'll wait for you.' His eyes laughed at her.

'Nick, is this because of what I asked you to do?' she demanded suddenly.

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‘You didn’t ask me,’ he defended.

‘Then it is, and I am much to blame.’

‘What, because I spoke to the King? My dear girl, that isn’t more than the introductory walk-around of this circus. Don’t run away with any question of responsibility. The only thing you are responsible for at this moment is to run with me—flee, vamoose, get out! Your life isn’t worth an hour’s purchase here. I’m convinced of that. And mine isn’t worth a minute’s.’

‘You see what a situation you put me in,’ she said accusingly.

‘I don’t put you in it; but I offer you a simple solution.’

‘Yourself!’

‘Well, yes; I said it was simple. I don’t claim it’s brilliant. Almost any one could do more for you; and there are millions of better men, but there isn’t one who could love you better. O Kate, Kate,’ he cried, rising. ‘trust yourself to my love, and I’ll back myself again. the world to make you happy.’

‘No, no,’ she exclaimed eagerly; ‘you must go away.’

He shook his head. ‘I can’t leave you. Ask that of some one else. Do you suppose a man who loves you can abandon you in this desert wilderness to take your chances? Do you suppose any man could do that? Kate, my darling, come with me. You torment me, you kill me, by forcing me to allow you a single moment out of my sight. I tell you, you are in imminent, deadly peril. You won’t stay, knowing that. Surely you won’t sacrifice your life for these creatures.’

‘Yes,’ she cried, rising, with the uplifted look on her face. ‘Yes! If it is good to live for them, it is good to die for them. I do not believe my life is necessary; but if it is necessary, that too!’

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Tarvin gazed at her, baffled, disheartened, at a loss.
‘And you won’t come?’

‘I can’t. Good-bye, Nick. It’s the end.’

He took her hand. ‘Good afternoon,’ he responded.
‘It’s end enough for to-day.’

She pursued him anxiously with her eye as he turned away; suddenly she started after him, ‘But you will go?’

‘Go! No! No!’ he shouted. ‘I’ll stay now if I have to organise a standing army, declare myself king, and hold the rest-house as the seat of government. Go!’

She put forth a detaining, despairing hand, but he was gone.

Kate returned to the little Maharaj Kunwar, who had been allowed to lighten his convalescence by bringing down from the palace a number of his toys and pets. She sat down by the side of the bed, and cried for a long time silently.

‘What is it, Miss Kate?’ asked the Prince, after he had watched her for some minutes, wondering. ‘Indeed, I am quite well now, so there is nothing to cry for. When I go back to the palace I will tell my father all that you have done for me, and he will give you a village. We Rajputs do not forget.’

‘It’s not that, Lalji,’ she said, stooping over him, drying her tear-stained eyes.

‘Then my father will give you two villages. No one must cry when I am getting well, for I am a king’s son. Where is Moti? I want him to sit upon a chair.’

Kate rose obediently, and began to call for the Maharaj Kunwar’s latest pet—a little gray monkey, with a gold collar, who wandered at liberty through the house and garden, and at night did his best to win a place for himself by the young Prince’s side. He answered the

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call from the boughs of a tree in the garden, where he was arguing with the wild parrots, and entered the room, crooning softly in the monkey tongue.

'Come here, little Hanuman,' said the Prince, raising one hand. The monkey bounded to his side. 'I have heard of a king,' said the Prince, playing with his golden collar, 'who spent three lakhs in marrying two monkeys. Moti, wouldst thou like a wife? No, no—a gold collar is enough for thee. We will spend our three lakhs in marrying Miss Kate to Tarvin Sahib, when we get well, and thou shalt dance at the wedding.' He was speaking in the vernacular, but Kate understood too well the coupling of her name with Tarvin's.

'Don't, Lalji, don't!'

'Why not, Kate? Why, even I am married.'

'Yes, yes. But it is different. Kate would rather you didn't, Lalji.'

'Very well,' answered the Maharaj, with a pout. 'Now I am only a little child. When I am well I will be a king again, and no one can refuse my gifts. Listen. Those are my father's trumpets. He is coming to see me.'

A bugle call sounded in the distance. There was a clattering of horses' feet, and a little later the Maharajah's carriage and escort thundered up to the door of the missionary's house. Kate looked anxiously to see if the noise irritated her young charge; but his eyes brightened, his nostrils quivered, and he whispered, as his hand tightened on the hilt of the sword always by his side—

'That is very good! My father has brought all his sowars.'

Before Kate could rise, Mr. Estes had ushered the Maharajah into the room, which was dwarfed by his

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bulk and by the bravery of his presence. He had been assisting at a review of his bodyguard, and came therefore in his full uniform as Commander-in-chief of the army of the State, which was no mean affair. The Maharaj Kunwar ran his eyes delightedly up and down the august figure of his father, beginning with the polished gold-spurred jack-boots, and ascending to the snowy-white doeskin breeches, the tunic blazing with gold, and the diamonds of the Order of the Star of India, ending with the saffron turban and its nodding emerald aigrette. The King drew off his gauntlets and shook hands cordially with Kate. After an orgy it was noticeable that his Highness became more civilised.

'And is the child well?' he asked. 'They told me that it was a little fever, and I, too, have had some fever.'

'The Prince's trouble was much worse than that, I am afraid, Maharajah Sahib,' said Kate.

'Ah, little one,' said the King, bending over his son very tenderly, and speaking in the vernacular, 'this is the fault of eating too much.'

'Nay, father, I did not eat, and I am quite well.'

Kate stood at the head of the bed stroking the boy's hair.

'How many troops paraded this morning?'

'Both squadrons, my General,' answered the father, his eye lighting with pride. 'Thou art all a Rajput, my son.'

'And my escort—where were they?'

'With Pertab Singh's troop. They led the charge at the end of the fight.'

'By the Sacred Horse,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, 'they shall lead in true fight one day. Shall they not, my father? Thou on the right flank, and I on the left.'

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'Even so. But to do these things, a prince must not be ill, and he must learn many things.'

'I know,' returned the Prince reflectively. 'My father, I have lain here some nights, thinking. Am I a little child?' He looked at Kate a minute, and whispered, 'I would speak to my father. Let no one come in.'

Kate left the room quickly, with a backward smile at the boy, and the King seated himself by the bed.

'No, I am not a little child,' said the Prince. 'In five years I shall be a man, and many men will obey me. But how shall I know the right or the wrong in giving an order?'

'It is necessary to learn many things,' repeated the Maharajah vaguely.

'Yes, I have thought of that lying here in the dark,' said the Prince. 'And it is in my mind that these things are not all learned within the walls of the palace, or from women. My father, let me go away to learn how to be a prince!'

'But whither wouldest thou go? Surely my kingdom is thy home, beloved.'

'I know, I know,' returned the boy. 'And I will come back again, but do not let me be a laughing-stock to the other princes. At the wedding the Rawut of Bunnaul mocked me because my school-books were not as many as his. And he is only the son of an ennobled lord. He is without ancestry. But he has been up and down Rajputana as far as Delhi and Agra, ay, and Abu; and he is in the upper class of the Princes' School at Ajmir. Father, all the sons of the kings go there. They do not play with the women; they ride with men. And the air and the water are good at Ajmir. And I should like to go!'

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The face of the Maharajah grew troubled, for the boy was very dear to him.

‘But an evil might befall thee, Lalji. Think again.’

‘I have thought,’ responded the Prince. ‘What evil can come to me under the charge of the Englishman there? The Rawut of Bunnaul told me that I should have my own rooms, my own servants, and my own stables, like the other princes—and that I should be much considered there.’

‘Yes,’ said the King soothingly. ‘We be Children of the Sun—thou and I, my Prince.’

‘Then it concerns me to be as learned and as strong and as valiant as the best of my race. Father, I am sick of running about the rooms of the women, of listening to my mother, and to the singing of the dance-girls; and they are always pressing their kisses on me. Let me go to Ajmir. Let me go to the Princes’ School. And in a year, even in a year—so says the Rawut of Bunnaul—I shall be fit to lead my escort, as a King should lead them. Is it a promise, my father?’

‘When thou art well,’ answered the Maharajah, ‘we will speak of it again—not as a father to a child, but as a man to a man.’

The Maharaj Kunwar’s eyes grew bright with pleasure. ‘That is good,’ he said—‘as a man to a man.’

The Maharajah fondled him in his arms for a few minutes, and told him the small news of the palace—such things as would interest a little boy. Then he said laughing, ‘Have I your leave to go?’

‘Oh! my father.’ The Prince buried his head in his father’s beard and threw his arms around him. The Maharajah disengaged himself gently, and as gently went out into the veranda. Before Kate returned he

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had disappeared in a cloud of dust and a flourish of trumpets. As he was going, a messenger came to the house bearing a grass-woven basket, piled high with shaddock, banana, and pomegranate—emerald, gold, and copper, which he laid at Kate's feet, saying, 'It is a present from the Queen.'

The little Prince within heard the voice, and cried joyfully, 'Kate, my mother has sent you those. Are they big fruits? Oh, give me a pomegranate,' he begged as she came back into his room. 'I have tasted none since last winter.'

Kate set the basket on the table, and the Prince's mood changed. He wanted pomegranate sherbet, and Kate must mix the sugar and the milk and the syrup and the plump red seeds. Kate left the room for an instant to get a glass, and it occurred to Moti, who had been foiled in an attempt to appropriate the Prince's emeralds, and had hidden under the bed, to steal forth and seize upon a ripe banana. Knowing well that the Maharaj Kunwar could not move, Moti paid no attention to his voice, but settled himself deliberately on his haunches, chose his banana, stripped off the skin with his little black fingers, grinned at the Prince, and began to eat.

'Very well, Moti,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, in the vernacular; 'Kate says you are not a god, but only a little gray monkey, and I think so too. When she comes back you will be beaten, Hanuman.'

Moti had half eaten the banana when Kate returned, but he did not try to escape. She cuffed the marauder lightly, and he fell over on his side.

'Why, Lalji, what's the matter with Moti?' she asked regarding the monkey curiously.

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‘He has been stealing, and now I suppose he is playing dead man. Hit him!’

Kate bent over the limp little body; but there was no need to chastise Moti. He was dead.

She turned pale, and, rising, took the basket of fruit quickly to her nostrils, and sniffed delicately at it. A faint, sweet, cloying odour rose from the brilliant pile. It was overpowering. She set the basket down, putting her hand to her head. The odour dizzied her.

‘Well,’ said the Prince, who could not see his dead pet. ‘I want my sherbet.’

‘The fruit is not quite good, I’m afraid, Lalji,’ she said, with an effort. As she spoke she tossed into the garden, through the open window, the uneaten fragment of the banana that Moti had clasped so closely to his wicked little breast.

A parrot swooped down on the morsel instantly from the trees, and took it back to his perch in the branches. It was done before Kate, still unsteadied, could make a motion to stop it, and a moment later a little ball of green feathers fell from the covert of leaves, and the parrot also lay dead on the ground.

‘No, the fruit is not good,’ she said mechanically, her eyes wide with terror, and her face blanched. Her thoughts leaped to Tarvin. Ah, the warnings and the entreaties that she had put from her! He had said she was not safe. Was he not right? The awful subtlety of the danger in which she stood was a thing to shake a stronger woman than she. From where would it come next? Out of what covert might it not leap? The very air might be poisoned. She scarcely dared to breathe.

The audacity of the attack daunted her as much as its

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design. If this might be done in open day, under cover of friendship, immediately after the visit of the King, what might not the gipsy in the palace dare next? She and the Maharaj Kunwar were under the same roof; if Tarvin was right in supposing that Sitabhai could wish her harm, the fruit was evidently intended for them both. She shuddered to think how she herself might have given the fruit to the Maharaj innocently.

The Prince turned in his bed and regarded Kate. 'You are not well?' he asked, with grave politeness. 'Then do not trouble about the sherbet. Give me Moti to play with.'

'O Lalji! Lalji!' cried Kate, tottering to the bed. She dropped beside the boy, cast her arms defendingly about him, and burst into tears.

'You have cried twice,' said the Prince, watching her heaving shoulders curiously. 'I shall tell Tarvin Sahib.'

The word smote Kate's heart, and filled her with a bitter and fruitless longing. Oh, for a moment of the sure and saving strength she had just rejected! Where was he? she asked herself reproachfully. What had happened to the man she had sent from her to take the chances of life and death in this awful land?

At that hour Tarvin was sitting in his room at the rest-house, with both doors open to the stifling wind of the desert, that he might command all approaches clearly, his revolver on the table in front of him, and the Naulahka in his pocket, yearning to be gone, and loathing this conquest that did not include Kate.

XIX

We be the Gods of the East—
Older than all—
Masters of mourning and feast,
How shall we fall?

Will they gape to the husks that ye proffer,
Or yearn to your song?
And we, have we nothing to offer
Who ruled them so long—

In the fume of the incense, the clash of the cymbal, the
blare of the conch and the gong?

Over the strife of the schools,
Low the day burns—
Back with the kine from the pools,
Each one returns

To the life that he knows where the altar-flame glows
and the tulsi is trimmed in the urns.

‘In Seonee.’

THE evening and the long night gave Kate ample time for self-examination after she had locked up the treacherous fruit, and consoled the Maharaj, through her tears, for the mysterious death of Moti. One thing only seemed absolutely clear to her, when she rose red-eyed and unrefreshed the next morn-

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ing: her work was with the women so long as life remained, and the sole refuge for her present trouble was in the portion of that work which lay nearest to her hand. Meanwhile the man who loved her remained in Gokral Seetarun, in deadly peril of his life, that he might be within call of her; and she could not call him, for to summon him was to yield, and she dared not.

She took her way to the hospital. The dread for him that had assailed her yesterday had become a horror that would not let her think.

The woman of the desert was waiting as usual at the foot of the steps, her hands clasped over her knee, and her face veiled. Behind her was Dhunpat Rai, who should have been among the wards; and she could see that the courtyard was filled with people—strangers and visitors, who, by her new regulations, were allowed to come only once a week. This was not their visiting day, and Kate, strained and worn by all that she had passed through since the day before, felt an angry impulse in her heart go out against them, and spoke wrathfully.

‘What is the meaning of this, Dhunpat Rai?’ she demanded, alighting.

‘There is commotion of popular bigotry within,’ said Dhunpat Rai. ‘It is nothing. I have seen it before. Only do not go in.’

She put him aside without a word, and was about to enter when she met one of her patients, a man in the last stage of typhoid fever, being borne out by half a dozen clamouring friends, who shouted at her menacingly. The woman of the desert was at her side in an instant, raising her hand, in the brown hollow of which lay a long, broad-bladed knife.

‘Be still, dogs!’ she shouted, in their own tongue.

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‘Dare not to lay hands on this peri, who has done all for you!’

‘She is killing our people,’ shouted a villager.

‘Maybe,’ said the woman, with a flashing smile; ‘but I know who will be lying here dead if you do not suffer her to pass. Are you Rajputs, or Bhils from the hills, hunters of fish, and diggers after grubs, that you run like cattle because a lying priest from nowhere troubles your heads of mud? Is she killing your people? How long can you keep that man alive with your charms and your muntras?’ she demanded, pointing to the stricken form on the stretcher. ‘Out—go out! Is this hospital your own village to defile? Have you paid one penny for the roof above you or the drugs in your bellies? Get hence before I spit upon you!’ She brushed them aside with a regal gesture.

‘It is best not to go in,’ said Dhunpat Rai in Kate’s ear. ‘There is local holy man in the courtyard, and he is agitating their minds. Also, I myself feel much indisposed.’

‘But what does all this mean?’ demanded Kate again.

For the hospital was in the hands of a hurrying crowd, who were strapping up bedding and cooking-pots, lamps and linen, calling to one another up and down the staircases in subdued voices, and bringing the sick from the upper wards as ants bring eggs out of a broken hill, six or eight bearers to each man—some holding bunches of marigold flowers in their hands, and pausing to mutter prayers at each step, others peering fearfully into the dispensary, and yet others drawing water from the well and pouring it out around the beds.

In the centre of the courtyard, as naked as the lunatic who had once lived there, sat an ash-smeared, long-haired,

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eagle-taloned, half-mad, wandering native priest, and waved above his head his buckhorn staff, sharp as a lance at one end, while he chanted in a loud monotonous voice some song that drove the men and women to work more quickly.

As Kate faced him, white with wrath, her eyes blazing, the song turned to a yelp of fierce hatred.

She dashed among the women swiftly—her own women, who she thought had grown to love her. But their relatives were about them, and Kate was thrust back by a bare-shouldered, loud-voiced dweller of the out-villages in the heart of the desert.

The man had no intention of doing her harm, but the woman of the desert slashed him across the face with her knife, and he withdrew howling.

‘Let me speak to them,’ said Kate, and the woman beside her quelled the clamour of the crowd with uplifted hands. Only the priest continued his song. Kate strode toward him, her little figure erect and quivering, crying in the vernacular, ‘Be silent, thou, or I will find means to close thy mouth!’

The man was hushed, and Kate, returning to her women, stood amongst them, and began to speak impassionedly.

‘Oh, my women, what have I done?’ she cried, still in the vernacular. ‘If there is any fault here, who should right it but your friend? Surely you can speak to me day or night.’ She threw out her arms. ‘Listen, my sisters! Have you gone mad, that you wish to go abroad now, half-cured, sick, or dying? You are free to go at any hour. Only, for your own sake, and for the sake of your children, do not go before I have cured you, if God so please. It is summer in the desert now, and many of you have come from many koss distant.’

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‘She speaks truth! She speaks truth,’ said a voice in the crowd.

‘Ay, I do speak truth. And I have dealt fairly by ye. Surely it is upon your heads to tell me the cause of this flight, and not to run away like mice. My sisters, ye are weak, and ill, and thy friends do not know what is best for thee. But I know.’

‘Arre! But what can we do?’ cried a feeble voice. ‘It is no fault of ours. I, at least, would fain die in peace, but the priest says—’

Then the clamour broke out afresh. ‘There are charms written upon the plasters—’

‘Why should we become Christians against our will? The wise woman that was sent away asks it.’

‘What are the meanings of the red marks on the plasters?’

‘Why should we have strange devil-marks stamped upon our bodies? And they burn, too, like the fires of hell.’

‘The priest came yesterday—that holy man yonder—and he said it had been revealed to him, sitting among the hills, that this devil’s plan was on foot to make us lose our religion—’

‘And to send us out of the hospital with marks upon our bodies—ay, and all the babies we should bear in the hospital should have tails like camels, and ears like mules. The wise woman says so; the priest says so.’

‘Hush! hush!’ cried Kate, in the face of these various words. ‘What plasters? What child’s talk is this of plasters and devils? Not one child, but many have been born here, and all were comely. Ye know it! This is the word of the worthless woman, whom I sent away because she was torturing you.’

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‘Nay, but the priest said—’

‘What care I for the priest? Has he nursed you? Has he watched by you of nights? Has he sat by your bedside, and smoothed your pillow, and held your hand in pain? Has he taken your children from you and put them to sleep, when he needed an hour’s rest?’

‘He is a holy man. He has worked miracles. We dare not face the anger of the Gods.’

One woman, bolder than the rest, shouted, ‘Look at this’; and held before Kate’s face one of the prepared mustard-leaves lately ordered from Calcutta, which bore upon the back, in red ink, the maker’s name and trade-mark.

‘What is this devil’s thing?’ demanded the woman fiercely.

The woman of the desert caught her by the shoulder and forced her to her knees.

‘Be still, woman without a nose!’ she cried, her voice vibrating with passion. ‘She is not of thy clay, and thy touch would defile her. Remember thine own dunghill, and speak softly.’

Kate picked up the plaster, smiling.

‘And who says there is devil’s work in this?’ she demanded.

‘The holy man, the priest. Surely he should know!’

‘Nay, ye should know,’ said Kate patiently. She understood now, and could pity. ‘Ye have worn it. Did it work ye any harm, Pithira?’ She pointed directly toward her. ‘Thou hast thanked me not once but many times for giving thee relief through this charm. If it was the devil’s work, why did it not consume thee?’

‘Indeed it burnt very much indeed,’ responded the woman, with a nervous laugh.

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Kate could not help laughing. ‘That is true. I cannot make my drugs pleasant. But ye know that they do good. What do these people, your friends—villagers, camel-drivers, goat-herds—know of English drugs? Are they so wise among their hills, or is the priest so wise, that they can judge for thee here, fifty miles away from them? Do not listen. Oh, do not listen! Tell them that ye will stay with me, and I will make thee well. I can do no more. It was for that I came. I heard of your misery ten thousand miles away, and it burnt into my heart. Would I have come so far to work you harm? Go back to your beds, my sisters, and bid these foolish people depart.’

There was a murmur among the women, as if of assent and doubt. For a moment the decision swayed one way and the other.

Then the man whose face had been slashed shouted, ‘What is the use of talking? Let us take our wives and sisters away! We do not wish to have sons like devils. Give us your voice, O father!’ he cried to the priest.

The holy man drew himself up, and swept away Kate’s appeal with a torrent of abuse, imprecation, and threats of damnation; and the crowd began to slip past Kate by twos and threes, half carrying and half forcing their kinsfolk with them.

Kate called on the women by name, beseeching them to stay—reasoning, arguing, expostulating. But to no purpose. Many of them were in tears; but the answer from all was the same. They were sorry, but they were only poor women, and they feared the wrath of their husbands.

Minute after minute the wards were depopulated of their occupants, as the priest resumed his song, and be-

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gan to dance frenziedly in the courtyard. The stream of colours broke out down the steps into the street, and Kate saw the last of her carefully swathed women borne out into the pitiless sun-glare—only the woman of the desert remaining by her side.

Kate looked on with stony eyes. Her hospital was empty.

XX

Our sister sayeth such and such,
And we must bow to her behests;
Our sister toileth overmuch,
Our little maid that hath no breasts.

A field untilled, a web unwove,
A bud withheld from sun or bee,
An alien in the courts of Love,
And priestess of his shrine is she.

We love her, but we laugh the while,
We laugh, but sobs are mixed with laughter;
Our sister hath no time to smile,
She knows not what must follow after.

Wind of the South, arise and blow,
From beds of spice thy locks shake free;
Breathe on her heart that she may know,
Breathe on her eyes that she may see.

Alas! we vex her with our mirth,
And maze her with most tender scorn,
Who stands beside the gates of Birth,
Herself a child—a child unborn!

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Our sister sayeth such and such,
And we must bow to her behests;
Our sister toileth overmuch,
Our little maid that hath no breasts.

From Libretto of 'Naulahka.'

'**H**AS the Miss sahib any orders?' asked Dhunpat Rai, with Oriental calmness, as Kate turned toward the woman of the desert, staying herself against her massive shoulder.

Kate simply shook her head with closed lips.
'It is very sad,' said Dhunpat Rai thoughtfully, as though the matter were one in which he had no interest; 'but it is on account of religious bigotry and intolerance which is prevalent mania in these parts. Once — twice before I have seen the same thing. About powders, sometimes; and once they said that the graduated glasses were holy vessels, and zinc ointment was cow-fat. But I have never seen all the hospital disembark simultaneously. I do not think they will come back; but my appointment is State appointment,' he said, with a bland smile, 'and so I shall draw my offeeshal income as before.'

Kate stared at him. 'Do you mean that they will never come back?' she asked falteringly.

'Oh yes — in time — one or two; two or three of the men when they are hurt by tigers, or have ophthalmia; but the women — no. Their husbands will never allow. Ask that woman!'

Kate bent a piteous look of inquiry upon the woman of the desert, who, stooping down, took up a little sand, let it trickle through her fingers, brushed her palms together, and shook her head. Kate watched these movements despairingly.

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'You see it is all up—no good,' said Dhunpat Rai, not unkindly, but unable to conceal a certain expression of satisfaction in a defeat which the wise had already predicted. 'And now what will your honour do? Shall I lock up dispensary, or will you audit drug accounts now?'

Kate waved him off feebly. 'No, no! Not now. I must think. I must have time. I will send you word. Come, dear one,' she added in the vernacular to the woman of the desert, and hand in hand they went out from the hospital together.

The sturdy Rajput woman caught her up like a child when they were outside, and set her upon her horse, and tramped doggedly alongside, as they set off together toward the house of the missionary.

'And whither wilt thou go?' asked Kate, in the woman's own tongue.

'I was the first of them all,' answered the patient being at her side; 'it is fitting therefore that I should be the last. Where thou goest I will go—and afterward what will fall will fall.'

Kate leaned down and took the woman's hand in hers with a grateful pressure.

At the missionary's gate she had to call up her courage not to break down. She had told Mrs. Estes so much of her hopes for the future, had dwelt so lovingly on all that she meant to teach these helpless creatures, had so constantly conferred with her about the help she had fancied herself to be daily bringing to them, that to own that her work had fallen to this ruin was unspeakably bitter. The thought of Tarvin she fought back. It went too deep.

But, fortunately, Mrs. Estes seemed not to be at home, and a messenger from the Queen Mother awaited

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Kate to demand her presence at the palace with the Maharaj Kunwar.

The woman of the desert laid a restraining hand on her arm, but Kate shook it off.

'No, no, no! I must go. I must do something,' she exclaimed almost fiercely, 'since there is still some one who will let me. I must have work. It is my only refuge, kind one. Go you on to the palace.'

The woman yielded silently, and trudged on up the dusty road, while Kate sped into the house and to the room where the young Prince lay.

'Lalji,' she said, bending over him, 'do you feel well enough to be lifted into the carriage and taken over to see your mother?'

'I would rather see my father,' responded the boy from the sofa, to which he had been transferred as a reward for the improvement he had made since yesterday. 'I wish to speak to my father upon a most important thing.'

'But your mother hasn't seen you for so long, dear.'

'Very well; I will go.'

'Then I will tell them to get the carriage ready.'

Kate turned to leave the room.

'No, please; I will have my own. Who is without there?'

'Heaven-born, it is I,' answered the deep voice of a trooper.

'Achcha! Ride swiftly, and tell them to send down my barouche and escort. If it is not here in ten minutes, tell Sirop Singh that I will cut his pay and blacken his face before all my men. This day I go abroad again.'

'May the mercy of God be upon the heaven-born for ten thousand years,' responded the voice from without, as the trooper heaved himself into the saddle and clattered away.

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By the time that the Prince was ready, a lumbering equipage, stuffed with many cushions, waited at the door. Kate and Mrs. Estes half helped and half carried the child into it, though he strove to stand on his feet in the veranda and acknowledge the salute of his escort as be-fitted a man.

'Ahi! I am very weak,' he said, with a little laugh, as they drove to the palace. 'Certainly it seems to myself that I shall never get well in Rhatore.'

Kate put her arm about him and drew him closer to her.

'Kate,' he continued, 'if I ask anything of my father, will you say that that thing is good for me?'

Kate, whose thoughts were still bitter and far away, patted his shoulder vaguely as she lifted her tear-stained eyes toward the red height on which the palace stood. 'How can I tell, Lalji?' She smiled down into his up-turned face.

'But it is a most wise thing.'

'Is it?' asked she fondly.

'Yes; I have thought it out by myself. I am myself a Raj Kumar, and I would go the the Raj Kumar College, where they train the sons of princes to become kings. That is only at Ajmir; but I must go and learn, and fight and ride with the other princes of Rajputana, and then I shall be altogether a man. I am going to the Raj Kumar College at Ajmir, that I may learn about the world. But you shall see how it is wise. The world looks very big since I have been ill. Kate, how big is the world which you have seen across the Black Water? Where is Tarvin Sahib? I have wished to see him too. Is Tarvin Sahib angry with me or with you?'

He plied her with a hundred questions till they halted

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before one of the gates in the flank of the palace that led to his mother's wing. The woman of the desert rose from the ground beside it, and held out her arms.

'I heard the message come,' she said to Kate, 'and I knew what was required. Give me the child to carry in. Nay, my Prince, there is no cause for fear. I am of good blood.'

'Women of good blood walk veiled, and do not speak in the streets,' said the child doubtfully.

'One law for thee and thine, and another for me and mine,' the woman answered, with a laugh. 'We who earn our bread by toil cannot go veiled, but our fathers lived before us for many hundred years, even as did thine, heaven-born. Come then, the white fairy cannot carry thee so tenderly as I can.'

She put her arms about him, and held him to her breast as easily as though he had been a three-year-old child. He leaned back luxuriously, and waved a wasted hand; the grim gate grated on its hinges as it swung back, and they entered together—the woman, the child, and the girl.

There was no lavish display of ornament in that part of the palace. The gaudy tilework on the walls had flaked and crumbled away in many places, the shutters lacked paint and hung awry, and there was litter and refuse in the courtyard behind the gates. A queen who has lost the King's favour loses much else as well in material comforts.

A door opened and a voice called. The three plunged into half darkness, and traversed a long, upward-sloping passage, floored with shining white stucco as smooth as marble, which communicated with the Queen's apartments. The Maharaj Kunwar's mother lived by pref-

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erence in one long, low room that faced to the north-east, that she might press her face against the marble tracery and dream of her home across the sands, eight hundred miles away, among the Kulu hills. The hum of the crowded palace could not be heard there, and the footsteps of her few waiting-women alone broke the silence.

The woman of the desert, with the Prince hugged more closely to her breast, moved through the labyrinth of empty rooms, narrow staircases, and roofed courtyards with the air of a caged panther. Kate and the Prince were familiar with the dark and the tortuousness, the silence and the sullen mystery. To the one it was part and parcel of the horrors amid which she had elected to move; to the other it was his daily life.

At last the journey ended. Kate lifted a heavy curtain, as the Prince called for his mother; and the Queen, rising from a pile of white cushions by the window, cried passionately—

‘Is it well with the child?’

The Prince struggled to the floor from the woman’s arms, and the Queen hung sobbing over him, calling him a thousand endearing names, and fondling him from head to foot. The child’s reserve melted—he had striven for a moment to carry himself as a man of the Rajput race: that is to say, as one shocked beyond expression at any public display of emotion—and he laughed and wept in his mother’s arms. The woman of the desert drew her hand across her eyes, muttering to herself, and Kate turned to look out of the window.

‘How shall I give you thanks?’ said the Queen at last. ‘Oh, my son—my little son—child of my heart, the gods and she have made thee well again. But who is that yonder?’

Her eyes fell for the first time on the woman of the

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desert, where the latter stood by the doorway draped in dull-red.

'She carried me here from the carriage,' said the Prince, 'saying that she was a Rajput of good blood.'

'I am of Chohan blood—a Rajput and a mother of Rajputs,' said the woman simply, still standing. 'The white fairy worked a miracle upon my man. He was sick in the head and did not know me. It is true that he died, but before the passing of the breath he knew me and called me by my name.'

'And she carried thee!' said the Queen, with a shiver, drawing the Prince closer to her, for, like all Indian women, she counted the touch and glance of a widow things of evil omen.

The woman fell at the Queen's feet. 'Forgive me, forgive me,' she cried. 'I had borne three little ones, and the gods took them all and my man at the last. It was good—it was so good—to hold a child in my arms again. Thou canst forgive,' she wailed; 'thou art so rich in thy son, and I am only a widow.'

'And I a widow in life,' said the Queen, under her breath. 'Of a truth, I should forgive. Rise thou.'

The woman lay still where she had fallen, clutching at the Queen's naked feet.

'Rise, then, my sister,' the Queen whispered.

'We of the fields,' murmured the woman of the desert, 'we do not know how to speak to the great people. If my words are rough, does the Queen forgive me?'

'Indeed I forgive. Thy speech is softer than that of the hill-women of Kulu, but some of the words are new.'

'I am of the desert—a herder of camels, a milker of goats. What should I know of the speech of courts? Let the white fairy speak for me.'

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Kate listened with an alien ear. Now that she had discharged her duty, her freed mind went back to Tarvin's danger and the shame and overthrow of an hour ago. She saw the women in her hospital slipping away one by one, her work unravelled, and all hope of good brought to wreck; and she saw Tarvin dying atrocious deaths, and, as she felt, by her hand.

'What is it?' she asked wearily, as the woman plucked at her skirt. Then to the Queen, 'This is a woman who alone of all those whom I tried to benefit remained at my side to-day, Queen.'

'There has been a talk in the palace,' said the Queen, her arm round the Prince's neck, 'a talk that trouble had come to your hospital, sahiba.'

'There is no hospital now,' Kate answered grimly.

'You promised to take me there, Kate, some day,' the Prince said in English.

'The women were fools,' said the woman of the desert quietly, from her place on the ground. 'A mad priest told them a lie—that there was a charm among the drugs—'

'Deliver us from all evil spirits and exorcisms,' the Queen murmured.

'A charm among her drugs that she handles with her own hands, and so forsooth, sahiba, they must run out shrieking that their children will be misborn apes, and their chicken-souls given to the devils. Aho! They will know in a week, not one or two, but many, whither their souls go: for they will die—the corn and the corn in the ear together.'

Kate shivered. She knew too well that the woman spoke the truth.

'But the drugs!' began the Queen. 'Who knows what

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powers there may be in the drugs?' she laughed nervously, glancing at Kate.

'Dekho! Look at her,' said the woman, with quiet scorn. 'She is a girl and naught else. What could she do to the Gates of Life?'

'She has made my son whole, therefore she is my sister,' said the Queen.

'She caused my man to speak to me before the death hour; therefore I am her servant as well as thine, sahiba,' said the other.

The Prince looked up in his mother's face curiously. 'She calls thee "thou,"' he said, as though the woman did not exist. 'That is not seemly between a villager and a queen, thee and thou!'

'We be both women, little son. Stay still in my arms. Oh, it is good to feel thee here again, worthless one.'

'The heaven-born looks as frail as dried maize,' said the woman quickly.

'A dried monkey, rather,' returned the Queen, dropping her lips on the child's head. Both mothers spoke aloud and with emphasis, that the gods, jealous of human happiness, might hear and take for truth the disparagement that veils deepest love.

'Aho, my little monkey is dead,' said the Prince, moving restlessly. 'I need another one. Let me go into the palace and find another monkey.'

'He must not wander into the palace from this chamber,' said the Queen passionately, turning to Kate. 'Thou art all too weak, beloved. O Miss sahib, he must not go.' She knew by experience that it was fruitless to cross her son's will.

'It is my order,' said the Prince, without turning his head. 'I will go.'

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'Stay with us, beloved,' said Kate. She was wondering whether the hospital could be dragged together again, after three months, and whether it was possible she might have overrated the danger to Nick.

'I go,' said the Prince, breaking from his mother's arms. 'I am tired of this talk.'

'Does the Queen give leave?' asked the woman of the desert under her breath. The Queen nodded, and the Prince found himself caught between two brown arms, against whose strength it was impossible to struggle.

'Let me go, widow!' he shouted furiously.

'It is not good for a Rajput to make light of a mother of Rajputs, my king,' was the unmoved answer. 'If the young steer does not obey the cow, he learns obedience from the yoke. The heaven-born is not strong. He will fall among those passages and stairs. He will stay here. When the rage has left his body he will be weaker than before. Even now'—the large bright eyes bent themselves on the face of the child—'even now,' the calm voice continued, 'the rage is going. One moment more, heaven-born, and thou wilt be a prince no longer, but only a little, little child, such as I have borne. Ahi, such as I shall never bear again.'

With the last words the Prince's head nodded forward on her shoulder. The gust of passion had spent itself, leaving him, as she had foreseen, weak to sleep.

'Shame—oh, shame!' he muttered thickly. 'Indeed I do not wish to go. Let me sleep.'

She began to pat him on the shoulder, till the Queen put forward hungry arms, and took back her own again, and laying the child on a cushion at her side, she spread the skirt of her long muslin robe over him, and looked long at her treasure. The woman crouched down on

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the floor. Kate sat on a cushion, and listened to the ticking of the cheap American clock in a niche in the wall. The voice of a woman singing a song came muffled and faint through many walls. The dry wind of noon sighed through the fretted screens of the window, and she could hear the horses of the escort swishing their tails and champing their bits in the courtyard a hundred feet below. She listened, thinking ever of Tarvin in growing terror. The Queen leaned over her son more closely, her eyes humid with mother love.

'He is asleep,' she said at last. 'What was the talk about his monkey, Miss sahib?'

'It died,' Kate said, and spurred herself to the lie. 'I think it had eaten bad fruit in the garden.'

'In the garden?' said the Queen quickly.

'Yes, in the garden.'

The woman of the desert turned her eyes from one woman to the other. These were matters too high for her, and she began timidly to rub the Queen's feet.

'Monkeys often die?' she observed. 'I have seen as it were a pestilence among the monkey folk over there at Banswarra.'

'In what fashion did it die?' insisted the Queen.

'I—I do not know,' Kate stammered, and there was another long silence as the hot afternoon wore on.

'Miss Kate, what do you think about my son?' whispered the Queen. 'Is he well, or is he not well?'

'He is not very well. In time he will grow stronger; but it would be better if he could go away for a while.'

The Queen bowed her head quietly. 'I have thought of that also many times sitting here alone; and it was the tearing out of my own heart from my breast. Yes, it would be well if he were to go away. But'—she

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stretched out her hands despairingly towards the sunshine—‘what do I know of the world where he will go, and how can I be sure that he will be safe? Here—even here’ . . . She checked herself suddenly. ‘Since you have come, Miss Kate, my heart has known a little comfort, but I do not know when you will go away again.’

‘I cannot guard the child against every evil,’ Kate replied, covering her face with her hands; ‘but send him away from this place as swiftly as may be. In God’s name let him go away.’

‘Such hai! Such hai! It is the truth, the truth!’ The Queen turned from Kate to the woman at her feet.

‘Thou hast borne three?’ she said.

‘Yea, three, and one other that never drew breath. They were all men-children,’ said the woman of the desert.

‘And the gods took them?’

‘Of smallpox one, and fever the two others.’

‘Art thou certain that it was the gods?’

‘I was with them always till the end.’

‘Thy man, then, was all thine own?’

‘We were only two, he and I. Among our villages the men are poor, and one wife suffices.’

‘Arre! They are rich among the villages. Listen now. If a co-wife had sought the lives of those three of thine—’

‘I would have killed her. What else?’ The woman’s nostrils dilated and her hand went swiftly to her bosom.

‘And if in place of three there had been one only, the delight of thy eyes, and thou hadst known that thou shouldst never bear another, and the co-wife working in darkness had sought for that life? What then?’

‘I would have slain her—but with no easy death. At

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her man's side and in his arms I would have slain her. If she died before my vengeance arrived I would seek for her in hell.'

'Thou canst go out in the sunshine and walk in the streets and no man turns his head,' said the Queen bitterly. 'Thy hands are free and thy face is uncovered. What if thou wert a slave among slaves, a stranger among stranger people, and'—the voice dropped—'dispossessed of the favour of thy lord?'

The woman, stooping, kissed the pale feet under her hands.

'Then I would not wear myself with strife, but, remembering that a man-child may grow into a king, would send that child away beyond the power of the co-wife.'

'Is it so easy to cut away the hand?' said the Queen, sobbing.

'Better the hand than the heart, sahiba. Who could guard such a child in this place?'

The Queen pointed to Kate. 'She came from far off, and she has once already brought him back from death.'

'Her drugs are good and her skill is great, but—thou knowest she is but a maiden, who has known neither gain nor loss. It may be that I am luckless, and that my eyes are evil—thus did not my man say last autumn—but it may be. Yet I know the pain at the breast and the yearning over the child new-born—as thou hast known it.'

'As I have known it.'

'My house is empty and I am a widow and childless, and never again shall a man call me to wed.'

'As I am—as I am!'

'Nay, the little one is left, whatever else may go; and

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the little one must be well guarded. If there is any jealousy against the child it were not well to keep him in this hotbed. Let him go out.'

'But whither? Miss Kate, dost thou know? The world is all dark to us who sit behind the curtain.'

'I know that the child of his own motion desires to go to the Princes' School in Ajmir. He has told me that much,' said Kate, who had lost no word of the conversation from her place on the cushion, bowed forward with her chin supported in her hands. 'It will be only for a year or two.'

The Queen laughed a little through her tears. 'Only a year or two, Miss Kate. Dost thou know how long is one night when he is not here?'

'And he can return at call; but no cry will bring back mine own. Only a year or two. The world is dark also to those who do not sit behind the curtain, sahiba. It is no fault of hers. How should she know?' said the woman of the desert under her breath to the Queen.

Against her will, Kate began to feel annoyed at this persistent exclusion of herself from the talk, and the assumption that she, with her own great trouble upon her, whose work was pre-eminently to deal with sorrow, must have no place in this double grief.

'How should I not know?' said Kate impetuously. 'Do I not know pain? Is it not my life?'

'Not yet,' said the Queen quietly. 'Neither pain nor joy. Miss Kate, thou art very wise, and I am only a woman who has never stirred beyond the palace walls. But I am wiser than thou, for I know that which thou dost not know, though thou hast given back my son to me, and to this woman her husband's speech. How shall I repay thee all I owe?'

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‘Let her hear truth,’ said the woman under her breath. ‘We be all three women here, sahiba—dead leaf, flowering tree, and the blossom unopened.’

The Queen caught Kate’s hands and gently pulled her forward till her head fell on the Queen’s knees. Wearied with the emotions of the morning, unutterably tired in body and spirit, the girl had no desire to lift it. The small hands put her hair back from her forehead, and the full dark eyes, worn with much weeping, looked into her own. The woman of the desert flung an arm round her waist.

‘Listen, my sister,’ began the Queen, with an infinite tenderness. ‘There is a proverb among my own people, in the mountains of the north, that a rat found a piece of turmeric, and opened a druggist’s shop. Even so with the pain that thou dost know and heal, beloved. Thou are not angry? Nay, thou must not take offence. Forget that thou art white, and I black, and remember only that we three be sisters. Little sister, with us women ’tis thus, and no other way. From all, except such as have borne a child, the world is hid. I make my prayers trembling to such and such a god, who thou sayest is black stone, and I tremble at the gusts of the night because I believe that the devils ride by my windows at such hours; and I sit here in the dark knitting wool and preparing sweetmeats that come back untasted from my lord’s table. And thou coming from ten thousand leagues away, very wise and fearing nothing, hast taught me, oh, ten thousand things. Yet thou art the child, and I am still the mother, and what I know thou canst not know, and the wells of my happiness thou canst not fathom, nor the bitter waters of my sorrow till thou hast tasted sorrow and grief alike. I have told

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thee of the child—all and more than all, thou sayest? Little sister, I have told thee less than the beginning of my love for him, because I knew that thou couldst not understand. I have told thee my sorrows—all and more than all, thou sayest, when I laid my head against thy breast? How could I tell thee all? Thou art a maiden, and the heart in thy bosom, beneath my heart, betrayed in its very beat that it did not understand. Nay, that woman there, coming from without, knows more of me than thee? And they taught thee in a school, thou hast told me, all manner of healing, and there is no disease in life that thou dost not understand? Little sister, how couldst thou understand life that hast never given it? Hast thou ever felt the tug of the child at the breast? Nay, what need to blush? Hast thou? I know thou hast not. Though I heard thy speech for the first time, and looking from the window saw thee walking, I should know. And the others—my sisters in the world—know also. But they do not all speak to thee as I do. When the life quickens under the breast, they, waking in the night, hear all the earth walking to that measure. Why should they tell thee? To-day the hospital has broken from under thee. Is it not so? And the women went out one by one? And what didst thou say to them?"

The woman of the desert, answering for her, spoke. 'She said, "Come back, and I will make ye well."

'And by what oath did she affirm her words?'

'There was no oath,' said the woman of the desert; 'she stood in the gate and called.'

'And upon what should a maiden call to bring wavering women back again? The toil that she has borne for their sake? They cannot see it. But of the pains that

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a woman has shared with them, a woman knows. There was no child in thy arms. The mother-look was not in thy eyes. By what magic, then, wouldest thou speak to women? There was a charm among the drugs, they said, and their children would be misshapen. What didst thou know of the springs of life and death to teach them otherwise? It is written in the books of thy school, I know, that such things cannot be. But we women do not read books. It is not from them that we learn of life. How should such an one prevail, unless the gods help her—and the gods are very far away. Thou hast given thy life to the helping of women. Little sister, when wilt thou also be a woman?"

The voice ceased. Kate's head was buried deep in the Queen's lap. She let it lie there without stirring.

"Ay!" said the woman of the desert. "The mark of coverture has been taken from my head, my glass bangles are broken on my arm, and I am unlucky to meet when a man sets forth on a journey. Till I die I must be alone, earning my bread alone, and thinking of the dead. But though I knew that it was to come again, at the end of one year instead of ten, I would still thank the gods that have given me love and a child. Will the Miss sahib take this in payment for all she did for my man? "A wandering priest, a childless woman, and a stone in the water are of one blood." So says the talk of our people. What will the Miss sahib do now? The Queen has spoken the truth. The gods and thy own wisdom, which is past the wisdom of a maid, have helped thee so far, as I, who was with thee always, have seen. The gods have warned thee that their help is at an end. What remains? Is this work for such as thou? Is it not as the Queen says? She, sitting here alone,

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seeing nothing, has seen that which I, moving with thee among the sick day by day, have seen and known. Little sister, is it not so?'

Kate lifted her head slowly from the Queen's knee, and rose.

'Take the child, and let us go,' she said hoarsely.

The merciful darkness of the room hid her face.

'Nay,' said the Queen, 'this woman shall take him. Go thou back alone.'

Kate vanished.

XXI

The Law whereby my lady moves
Was never Law to me,
But 'tis enough that she approves
Whatever Law it be.

For in that Law, and by that Law,
My constant course I'll steer;
Not that I heed or deem it dread,
But that she holds it dear.

Tho' Asia sent for my content
Her richest argosies,
Those would I spurn, and bid return,
If that should give her ease.

With equal heart I'd watch depart
Each spliced sail from sight,
Sans bitterness, desiring less
Great gear than her delight.

Yet such am I, yea such am I—
Sore bond and freest free,—
The Law that sways my lady's ways
Is mystery to me!

TO sit still, and to keep sitting still, is the first lesson that the young jockey must learn. Tarvin was learning it in bitterness of spirit. For the sake of his town, for the sake of his love, and, above all, for the sake of his love's life, he must go. The town

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was waiting, his horse was saddled at the door, but his love would not come. He must sit still.

The burning desert wind blew through the open veranda as remorselessly as Sitabhai's hate. Looking out, he saw nothing but the city asleep in the sunshine and the wheeling kites above it. Yet when evening fell, and a man might be able by bold riding to escape to the railway, certain shrouded figures would creep from the walls and take up their position within easy gunshot of the rest-house. One squatted at each point of the compass, and between them, all night long, came and went a man on horseback. Tarvin could hear the steady beat of the hoofs as he went his rounds, and the sound did not give him fresh hope. But for Kate—but for Kate, he repeated to himself, he would have been long since beyond reach of horse or bullet. The hours were very slow, and as he sat and watched the shadows grow and shorten it seemed to him, as it had seemed so often before, that this and no other was the moment that Topaz would choose to throw her chances from her.

He had lost already, he counted, eight-and-forty precious hours, and, so far as he could see, the remainder of the year might be spent in an equally unprofitable fashion.

Meantime Kate lay exposed to every imaginable danger. Sitabhai was sure to assume that he had wrested the necklace from her for the sake of the 'frail white girl'; she had said as much on the dam. It was for Kate's sake, in a measure; but Tarvin reflected bitterly that an Oriental had no sense of proportion, and, like the snake, strikes first at that which is nearest. And Kate? How in the world was he to explain the case to her? He had told her of danger about her path as well as his own,

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and she had decided to face that danger. For her courage and devotion he loved her; but her obstinacy made him grit his teeth. There was but one grimly comical element in the terrible jumble. What would the King say to Sitabhai when he discovered that she had lost the Luck of the State? In what manner would she veil that loss; and, above all, into what sort of royal rage would she fall? Tarvin shook his head meditatively. ‘It’s quite bad enough for me,’ he said, ‘just about as bad as it can possibly be made; but I have a wandering suspicion that it may be unwholesome for Juggut. Yes! I can spare time to be very sorry for Juggut. My fat friend, you should have held straight that first time, outside the city walls!’

He rose and looked out into the sunlight, wondering which of the scattered vagrants by the roadside might be an emissary from the palace. A man lay apparently asleep by the side of his camel near the road that ran to the city. Tarvin stepped out casually from the veranda, and saw, as soon as he was fairly in the open, that the sleeper rolled round to the other side of his beast. He strolled forward a few paces. The sunlight glinted above the back of the camel on something that shone like silver. Tarvin marched straight toward the glitter, his pistol in his hand. The man, when he came up to him, was buried in innocent slumber. Under the fold of his garment peered the muzzle of a new and very clean rifle.

‘Looks as if Sitabhai was calling out the militia, and supplying them with outfits from her private armoury. Juggut’s gun was new, too,’ said Tarvin, standing over the sleeper. ‘But this man knows more about guns than Juggut. Hi!’ He stooped down and stirred the

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man up with the muzzle of his revolver. ‘I’m afraid I must trouble you for that gun. And tell the lady to drop it, will you? It won’t pay.’

The man understood the unspoken eloquence of the pistol, and nothing more. He gave up his gun sullenly enough, and moved away, lashing his camel spitefully.

‘Now, I wonder how many more of her army I shall have to disarm,’ said Tarvin, retracing his steps, the captured gun over his shoulder. ‘I wonder—no, I won’t believe that she would dare to do anything to Kate! She knows enough of me to be sure that I’d blow her and her old palace into to-morrow. If she’s half the woman she pretends to be, she’ll reckon with me before she goes much further.’

In vain he attempted to force himself into this belief. Sitabhai had shown him what sort of thing her mercy might be, and Kate might have tasted it ere this. To go to her now—to be maimed or crippled at the least if he went to her now—was impossible. Yet he decided that he would go. He returned hastily to Fibby, whom he had left not three minutes before flicking flies off in the sunshine at the back of the rest-house. But Fibby lay on his side groaning piteously, hamstrung and dying.

Tarvin could hear his groom industriously polishing a bit round the corner, and when the man came up in response to his call he flung himself down by the side of the horse, howling with grief.

‘An enemy hath done this, an enemy hath done this!’ he clamoured. ‘My beautiful brown horse that never did harm except when he kicked through fullness of meat. Where shall I find a new service if I let my charge die thus?’

‘I wish I knew! I wish I knew!’ said Tarvin, puzzled,

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and almost despairing. ‘There’d be a bullet through one black head, if I were just a little surer. Get up, you! Fibby, old man, I forgive you all your sins. You were a good old boy, and—here’s luck.’

The blue smoke enveloped Fibby’s head for an instant, the head fell like a hammer, and the good horse was out of his pain. The groom, rising, rent the air with grief, till Tarvin kicked him out of the pickets and bade him begone. Then it was noticeable that his cries ceased suddenly, and, as he retreated into his mud-house to tie up his effects, he smiled and dug up some silver from a hole under his bedstead.

Tarvin, dismounted, looked east, west, north, south for help, as Sitabhai had looked on the dam. A wandering gang of gipsies with their lean bullocks and yelping dogs turned an angle of the city wall, and rested like a flock of unclean birds by the city gate. The sight in itself was not unusual, but city regulations forbade camping within a quarter of a mile of the walls.

‘Some of the lady’s poor relatives, I suppose. They have blocked the way through the gate pretty well. Now, if I were to make a bolt of it to the missionary’s they’d have me, wouldn’t they?’ muttered Tarvin to himself. ‘On the whole, I’ve seen prettier professions than trading with Eastern queens. They don’t seem to understand the rules of the game.’

At that moment a cloud of dust whirled through the gipsy camp, as the escort of the Maharaj Kunwar, clearing the way for the barouche, scattered the dark band to the left and right. Tarvin wondered what this might portend. The escort halted with the customary rattle of accoutrements at the rest-house door, the barouche behind them. A single trooper, two hundred yards or

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more in the rear, lifted his voice in a deferential shout as he pursued the carriage. He was answered by a chuckle from the escort, and two shrill screams of delight from the occupants of the barouche.

A child whom Tarvin had never before seen stood upright in the back of the carriage, and hurled a torrent of abuse in the vernacular at the outpaced trooper. Again the escort laughed.

‘Tarvin Sahib! Tarvin Sahib!’ piped the Maharaj Kunwar. ‘Come and look at us.’

For a moment Tarvin fancied this a fresh device of the enemy; but reassured by the sight of his old and trusted ally, the Maharaj, he stepped forward.

‘Prince,’ he said, as he took his hand, ‘you ought not to be out.’

‘Oh, it is all right,’ said the young man hastily, though his little pale face belied it. ‘I gave the order and we came. Miss Kate gives me orders; but she took me over to the palace, and there I give orders. This is Umr Singh—my brother, the little Prince; but I shall be King.’

The second child raised his eyes slowly and looked full at Tarvin. The eyes and the low broad forehead were those of Sitabhai, and the mouth closed firmly over the little pearl-like teeth, as his mother’s mouth had closed in the conflict on the Dungar Talao.

‘He is from the other side of the palace,’ answered the Maharaj, still in English. ‘From the other side, where I must not go. But when I was in the palace I went to him—ha, ha, Tarvin Sahib—and he was killing a goat. Look! His hands are all red now.’

Umr Singh opened a tiny palm at a word from the Maharaj in the vernacular, and flung it outward at Tarvin. It was dark with dried blood, and a bearded whis-

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per ran among the escort. The commandant turned in his saddle, and, nodding at Tarvin, muttered, ‘Sitabhai.’ Tarvin caught the word, and it was sufficient for him. Providence had sent him help out of a clear sky. He framed a plan instantly.

‘But how did you come here, you young imps?’ he demanded.

‘Oh, there are only women in the palace yonder, and I am a Rajput and a man. He cannot speak any English at all,’ he added, pointing to his companion; ‘but when we have played together I have told him about you, Tarvin Sahib, and about the day you picked me out of my saddle, and he wished to come too, to see all the things you show me, so I gave the order very quietly, and we came out of the little door together. And so we are here! Salaam, baba,’ he said patronisingly to the child at his side, and the child, slowly and gravely, raised his hand to his forehead, still gazing with fixed, incurious eyes on the stranger. Then he whispered something that made the Maharaj Kunwar laugh. ‘He says,’ said the Maharaj Kunwar, ‘that you are not so big as he thought. His mother told him that you were stronger than any man, but some of these troopers are bigger than you.’

‘Well, what do you want me to do?’ asked Tarvin.

‘Show him your gun and how you shoot rupees, and what you do that makes horses quiet when they kick, and all those things.’

‘All right,’ said Tarvin. ‘But I can’t show them here. Come over to Mr. Estes with me.’

‘I do not like to go there. My monkey is dead. And I do not think Kate would like to see us. She is always crying now. She took me up to the palace yesterday,

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and this morning I went to her again; but she would not see me.'

Tarvin could have hugged the child for the blessed assurance that Kate at least still lived. 'Isn't she at the hospital, then?' he asked thickly.

'Oh, the hospital has all gone phut. There are no women now. They all ran away.'

'No!' cried Tarvin. 'Say that again, little man. What for?'

'Devils,' said the Maharaj Kunwar briefly. 'What do I know? It was some women's talk. Show him how you ride, Tarvin Sahib.'

Again Umr Singh whispered to his companion, and put one leg over the side of the barouche. 'He says he will ride in front of you, as I told him I did,' interpreted the Prince. 'Gurdit Singh, dismount!'

A trooper flung himself out of the saddle on the word, and stood to attention at the horse's head. Tarvin, smiling to himself at the perfection of his opportunity, said nothing, but leapt into the saddle, picked Umr Singh out of his barouche, and placed him carefully before him.

'Sitabhai would be rather restless if she could see me,' he murmured to himself, as he tucked his arm round the lithe little figure. 'I don't think there will be any Jug-gutting while I carry this young man in front of me.'

As the escort opened to allow Tarvin to take his place at their head, a wandering priest, who had been watching the episode from a little distance, turned and shouted with all the strength of his lungs across the plain, in the direction of the city. The cry was taken up by unseen voices, passed on to the city walls, and died away on the sands beyond.

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Umr Singh smiled, as the horse began to trot, and urged Tarvin to go faster. This the Maharaj forbade. He wished to see the sight comfortably from his seat in the barouche. As he passed the gipsy camp, men and women threw themselves down on the sands, crying, ‘Jai! Jungle da badshah jai!’ and the faces of the troopers darkened.

‘That means,’ cried the Maharaj Kunwar, ‘Victory to the King of the Desert. I have no money to give them. Have you, Tarvin Sahib?’

In his joy at being now safely on his way to Kate, Tarvin could have flung everything he possessed to the crowd—almost the Naulahka itself. He emptied a handful of copper and small silver among them, and the cry rose again, but bitter laughter was mingled with it, and the gipsy folk called to each other, mocking. The Maharaj Kunwar’s face turned scarlet. He leaned forward listening for an instant, and then shouted, ‘By Indur, it is for him! Scatter their tents!’ At a wave of his hand the escort, wheeling, plunged through the camp in line, driving the light ash of the fires up in clouds, slashing the donkeys with the flat of their swords until they stampeded, and carrying away the frail brown tents on the butts of their reversed lances.

Tarvin looked on contentedly at the dispersal of the group, which he knew would have stopped him if he had been alone.

Umr Singh bit his lip. Then, turning to the Maharaj Kunwar, he smiled, and put forward from his belt the hilt of his sword in sign of fealty.

‘It is just, my brother,’ he said in the vernacular. ‘But I’—here he raised his voice a little—‘would not drive the gipsy folk too far. They always return.’

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'Ay,' cried a voice from the huddled crowd, watching the wreck of the camp, significantly, 'gipsies always return, my King.'

'So does a dog,' said the Maharaj, between his teeth. 'Both are kicked. Drive on.'

And a pillar of dust came to Estes' house, Tarvin riding in safety in the midst of it.

Telling the boys to play until he came out, he swept into the house, taking the steps two at a time, and discovered Kate in a dark corner of the parlour with a bit of sewing in her hand. As she looked up he saw that she was crying.

'Nick!' she exclaimed voicelessly. 'Nick!' He had stopped, hesitating on the threshold; she dropped her work, and rose breathless. 'You have come back! It is you! You are alive!'

Tarvin smiled, and held out his arms. 'Come and see!' She took a step forward.

'Oh, I was afraid—'

'Come!'

She went doubtfully toward him. He caught her fast, and held her in his arms.

For a long minute she let her head lie on his breast. Then she looked up. 'This isn't what I meant,' she protested.

'Oh, don't try to improve on it!' Tarvin said hastily.

'She tried to poison me. I was sure when I heard nothing that she must have killed you. I fancied horrible things.'

'Poor child! And your hospital has gone wrong? You have been having a hard time. But we will change all that. We must leave as soon as you can get ready. I've nipped her claws for a moment; I'm holding a host-

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age. But we can't keep that up for ever. We must get away.'

'We!' she repeated feebly.

'Well, do you want to go alone?'

She smiled as she released herself. 'I want you to.'

'And you?'

'I'm not worth thinking of. I have failed. Everything I meant to do has fallen about me in a heap. I feel burnt out, Nick—burnt out!'

'All right! We'll put in new works and launch you on a fresh system. That's what I want. There shall be nothing to remind you that you ever saw Rhatore, dear.'

'It was a mistake,' she said.

'What?'

'Everything. My coming. My thinking I could do it. It's not a girl's work. It's my work, perhaps; but it's not for me. I have given it up, Nick. Take me home.'

Tarvin gave an unbecoming shout of joy, and folded her in his arms again. He told her that they must be married at once, and start that night, if she could manage it; and Kate, dreading what might befall him, assented doubtfully. She spoke of preparations; but Tarvin said that they would prepare after they had done it. They could buy things at Bombay—stacks of things. He was sweeping her forward with the onrush of his extempore plans, when she said suddenly, 'But what of the dam, Nick? You can't leave that.'

'Shucks!' exclaimed Tarvin heartily. 'You don't suppose there's any gold in the old river, do you?'

She recoiled quickly from his arms, staring at him in accusation and reproach.

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'Do you mean that you have always known that there was no gold there?' she asked.

Tarvin pulled himself together quickly; but not so quickly that she did not catch the confession in his eye.

'I see you have,' she said coldly.

Tarvin measured the crisis which had suddenly descended on him out of the clouds; he achieved an instantaneous change of front, and met her smiling.

'Certainly,' he said; 'I have been working it as a blind.'

'A blind?' she repeated. 'To cover what?'

'You.'

'What do you mean?' she inquired, with a look in her eyes which made him uncomfortable.

'The Indian Government allows no one to remain in the State without a definite purpose. I couldn't tell Colonel Nolan that I had come courting you, could I?'

'I don't know. But you could have avoided taking the Maharajah's money to carry out this—this plan. An honest man would have avoided that.'

'Oh, look here!' exclaimed Tarvin.

'How could you cheat the King into thinking that there was a reason for your work, how could you let him give you the labour of a thousand men, how could you take his money? O Nick!'

He gazed at her for a vacant and hopeless minute. 'Why, Kate,' he exclaimed, 'do you know you are talking of the most stupendous joke the Indian empire has witnessed since the birth of time?'

This was pretty good, but it was not good enough. He plunged for a stronger hold as she answered, with a perilous little note of breakdown in her voice, 'You make it worse.'

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‘Well, your sense of humour never was your very strongest point, you know, Kate.’ He took the seat next her, leaned over and took her hand, as he went on. ‘Doesn’t it strike you as rather amusing, though, after all, to rip up half a state to be near a very small little girl—a very sweet, very extra lovely little girl, but still a rather tiny little girl in proportion to the size of the Amet valley? Come—doesn’t it?’

‘Is that all you have to say?’ asked she. Tarvin turned pale. He knew the tone of finality he heard in her voice; it went with a certain look of scorn when she spoke of any form of moral baseness that moved her. He recognised his condemnation in it and shuddered. In the moment that passed, while he still kept silence, he recognised this for the crisis of his life. Then he took strong hold of himself, and said quietly, easily, unscrupulously—

‘Why, you don’t suppose that I’m not going to ask the Maharajah for his bill, do you?’

She gasped a little. Her acquaintance with Tarvin did not help her to follow his dizzying changes of front. His bird’s skill to make his level flight, his reeling dips and circling returns upon himself, all seem part of a single impulse, must ever remain confusing to her. But she rightly believed in his central intention to do the square thing, if he could find out what it was; and her belief in his general strength helped her not to see at this moment that he was deriving his sense of the square thing from herself. She could not know, and probably could not have imagined, how little his own sense of the square thing had to do with any system of morality, and how entirely he must always define morality as what pleased Kate. Other women liked confections; she pre-

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ferred morality, and he meant she should have it, if he had to turn pirate to get it for her.

'You didn't think I wasn't paying for the show?' he pursued bravely; but in his heart he was saying, 'She loathes it. She hates it. Why didn't I think? why didn't I think?' He added aloud, 'I had my fun, and now I've got you. You're both cheap at the price, and I'm going to step up and pay it like a little man. You must know that.'

His smile met no answering smile. He mopped his forehead and stared anxiously at her. All the easiness in the world couldn't make him sure what she would say next. She said nothing, and he had to go on desperately, with a cold fear gathering about his heart. 'Why, it's just like me, isn't it, Kate, to work a scheme on the old Rajah? It's like a man who owns a mine that's turning out \$2000 a month, to rig a game out in this desert country to do a confiding Indian Prince out of a few thousand rupees?' He advanced this recently inspired conception of his conduct with an air of immemorial familiarity, born of desperation.

'What mine?' she asked, with dry lips.

'The "Lingering Lode," of course. You've heard me speak of it?'

'Yes, but I didn't know—'

'That it was doing that? Well, it is—right along. Want to see the assay?'

'No,' she answered. 'No. But that makes you—Why, but, Nick, that makes you—'

'A rich man? Moderately, while the lead holds out. Too rich for petty larceny, I guess.'

He was joking for his life. The heart-sickening seriousness of his unseriousness was making a hole in his

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head; the tension was too much for him. In the mad fear of that moment his perceptions doubled their fineness. Something went through him as he said ‘larceny.’ Then his heart stopped. A sure, awful, luminous perception leaped upon him, and he knew himself for lost.

If she hated this, what would she say to the other? Innocent, successful, triumphant, even gay it seemed to him; but what to her? He turned sick.

Kate or the Naulahka. He must choose. The Naulahka or Kate?

‘Don’t make light of it,’ she was saying. ‘You would be just as honest if you couldn’t afford it, Nick. Ah,’ she went on, laying her hand on his lightly, in mute petition for having even seemed to doubt him, ‘I know you, Nick! You like to make the better seem the worse reason; you like to pretend to be wicked. But who is so honest? O Nick! I knew you had to be true. If you weren’t, everything else would be wrong.’

He took her in his arms. ‘Would it, little girl?’ he asked, looking down at her. ‘We must keep the other things right, then, at any expense.’

He heaved a deep sigh as he stooped and kissed her.

‘Have you such a thing as a box?’ he asked, after a long pause.

‘Any sort of box?’ asked Kate bewilderedly.

‘No—well, it ought to be the finest box in the world, but I suppose one of those big grape boxes will do. It isn’t every day that one sends presents to a queen.’

Kate handed him a large chip box in which long green grapes from Kabul had been packed. Discoloured cotton wool lay at the bottom.

‘That was sold at the door the other day,’ she said. ‘Is it big enough?’

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Tarvin turned away without answering, emptied something that clicked like a shower of pebbles upon the wool, and sighed deeply. Topaz was in that box. The voice of the Maharaj Kunwar lifted itself from the next room.

'Tarvin Sahib--Kate, we have eaten all the fruit, and now we want to do something else.'

'One moment, little man,' said Tarvin. With his back still toward Kate, he drew his hand caressingly, for the last time, over the blazing heap at the bottom of the box, fondling the stones one by one. The great green emerald pierced him, he thought, with a reproachful gaze. A mist crept into his eyes; the diamond was too bright. He shut the lid down upon the box hastily, and put it into Kate's hands with a decisive gesture; he made her hold it while he tied it in silence. Then in a voice not his, he asked her to take the box to Sitabhai with his compliments. 'No,' he continued, seeing the alarm in her eyes. 'She won't--she daren't hurt you now. Her child's coming along with us; and I'll go with you, of course, as far as I can. Glory be, it's the last journey that you'll ever undertake in this infernal land. The last but one, that's to say. We live at high pressure in Rhatore--too high pressure for me. Be quick, if you love me.'

Kate hastened to put on her helmet, while Tarvin amused the two princes by allowing them to inspect his revolver, and promising at some more fitting season to shoot as many coins as they should demand. The lounging escort at the door was suddenly scattered by a trooper from without, who flung his horse desperately through their ranks, shouting, 'A letter for Tarvin Sahib!'

Tarvin stepped into the veranda, took a crumpled

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half-sheet of paper from the outstretched hand, and read these words, traced painfully and laboriously in an unformed round hand:—

‘Dear Mr. Tarvin—Give me the boy and keep the other thing. Your affectionate Friend.’

Tarvin chuckled and thrust the note into his waist-coat pocket. ‘There is no answer,’ he said—and to himself: ‘You’re a thoughtful girl, Sitabhai, but I’m afraid you’re just a little too thoughtful. That boy’s wanted for the next half-hour. Are you ready, Kate?’

The princes lamented loudly when they were told that Tarvin was riding over to the palace at once, and that, if they hoped for further entertainment, they must both go with him. ‘We will go into the great Durbar Hall,’ said the Maharaj Kunwar consolingly to his companion at last, ‘and make all the music-boxes play together.’

‘I want to see that man shoot,’ said Umr Singh. ‘I want to see him shoot something dead. I do not wish to go to the palace.’

‘You’ll ride on my horse,’ said Tarvin, when the answer had been interpreted, and I’ll make him gallop all the way. Say, Prince, how fast do you think your carriage can go?’

‘As fast as Miss Kate dares.’

Kate stepped in, and the cavalcade galloped to the palace, Tarvin riding always a little in front with Umr Singh clapping his hands on the saddle-bow.

‘We must pull up at Sitabhai’s wing, dear,’ Tarvin cried. ‘You won’t be afraid to walk in under the arch with me?’

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'I trust you, Nick,' she answered simply, getting out of the carriage.

'Then go into the women's wing. Give the box into Sitabhai's hands, and tell her that I sent it back. You'll find she knows my name.'

The horse trampled under the archway, Kate at its side, and Tarvin holding Umr Singh very much in evidence. The courtyard was empty, but as they came out into the sunshine by the central fountain the rustle and whisper behind the shutters rose, as the tiger-grass rustles when the wind blows through it.

'One minute, dear,' said Tarvin, halting, 'if you can bear this sun on your head.'

A door opened and a eunuch came out, beckoning silently to Kate. She followed him and disappeared, the door closing behind her. Tarvin's heart rose into his mouth, and unconsciously he clasped Umr Singh so closely to his breast that the child cried out.

The whisper rose, and it seemed to Tarvin as if some one were sobbing behind the shutters. Then followed a peal of low, soft laughter, and the muscles at the corner of Tarvin's mouth relaxed. Umr Singh began to struggle in his arms.

'Not yet, young man. You must wait until—ah! thank God.'

Kate reappeared, her little figure framed against the darkness of the doorway. Behind her came the eunuch, crawling fearfully to Tarvin's side. Tarvin smiled affably, and dropped the amazed young prince into his arms. Umr Singh was borne away kicking, and ere they left the courtyard Tarvin heard the dry roar of an angry child, followed by an unmistakable yelp of pain. Tarvin smiled.

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‘They spank young princes in Rajputana. That’s one step on the path to progress. What did she say, Kate?’

‘She said I was to be sure and tell you that she knew you were not afraid. “Tell Tarvin Sahib that I knew he was not afraid.”’

‘Where’s Umr Singh?’ asked the Maharaj Kunwar from the barouche.

‘He’s gone to his mother. I’m afraid I can’t amuse you just now, little man. I’ve forty thousand things to do, and no time to do them in. Tell me where your father is.’

‘I do not know. There has been trouble and crying in the palace. The women are always crying, and that makes my father angry. I shall stay at Mr. Estes’ and play with Kate.’

‘Yes. Let him stay,’ said Kate quickly. ‘Nick, do you think I ought to leave him?’

‘That’s another of the things I must fix,’ said Tarvin. ‘But first I must find the Maharajah, if I have to dig up Rhatore for him. What’s that, little one?’

A trooper whispered to the young Prince.

‘This man says that he is there,’ said the Maharaj Kunwar. ‘He has been there since two days. I also have wished to see him.’

‘Very good. Drive home, Kate. I’ll wait here.’

He re-entered the archway, and reined up. Again the whisper behind the shutter rose, and a man from a doorway demanded his business.

‘I must see the Maharajah,’ said Tarvin.

‘Wait,’ said the man. And Tarvin waited for a full five minutes, using his time for concentrated thought.

Then the Maharajah emerged, and amiability sat on every hair of his newly-oiled moustache.

For some mysterious reason Sitabhai had withdrawn

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the light of her countenance from him for two days, and had sat raging in her own apartments. Now the mood had passed, and the gipsy would see him again. Therefore the Maharajah's heart was glad within him; and wisely, as befitted the husband of many wives, he did not inquire too closely into the reasons that had led to the change.

'Ah, Tarvin Sahib,' said he, 'I have not seen you for long. What is the news from the dam? Is there anything to see?'

'Maharajah Sahib, that's what I've come to talk about. There is nothing to see, and I think that there is no gold to be got at.'

'That is bad,' said the King lightly.

'But there is a good deal to be seen, if you care to come along. I don't want to waste your money any more, now I'm sure of the fact; but I don't see the use of saving all the powder on the dam. There must be five hundred pounds of it.'

'I do not understand,' said the Maharajah, whose mind was occupied with other things.

'Do you want to see the biggest explosion that you've ever seen in your life? Do you want to hear the earth shake, and see the rocks fly?'

The Maharajah's face brightened.

'Will it be seen from the palace?' he said; 'from the top of the palace?'

'Oh yes. But the best place to watch it will be from the side of the river. I shall put the river back at five o'clock. It's three o'clock now. Will you be there, Maharajah Sahib?'

'I will be there. It will be a big tamasha. Five hundred pounds of powder! The earth will be rent in two.'

'I should remark. And after that, Maharajah Sahib,

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I am going to be married; and then I am going away.
Will you come to the wedding?"

The Maharajah shaded his eyes from the sun-glare, and peered up at Tarvin under his turban.

"By God, Tarvin Sahib," said he, "you are a quick man. So you will marry the doctor-lady, and then you will go away? I will come to the wedding. I and Pertab Singh."

The next two hours in the life of Nicholas Tarvin will never be adequately chronicled. There was a fierce need upon him to move mountains and shift the poles of the earth; there was a strong horse beneath him, and in his heart the knowledge that he had lost the Naulahka and gained Kate. When he appeared, a meteor amid the coolies on the dam, they understood, and a word was spoken that great things were toward. The gang foreman turned to his shouts, and learned that the order of the day was destruction—the one thing that the Oriental fully comprehends.

They dismantled the powder-shed with outcries and fierce yells, hauled the bullock-carts from the crown of the dam, and dropped the derrick after them, and tore down the mat and grass coolie-lines. Then, Tarvin urging them always, they buried the powder-casks in the crown of the half-built dam, piled the wrapped charges upon them, and shovelled fresh sand atop of all.

It was a hasty onslaught, but the powder was at least all in one place, and it should be none of Tarvin's fault if the noise and smoke at least did not delight the Maharajah.

A little before five he came with his escort, and Tarvin, touching fire to a many-times-lengthened fuse, bade all men run back. The fire ate slowly the crown of the dam.

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Then with a dull roar the dam opened out its heart in a sheet of white flame, and the masses of flying earth darkened the smoke above.

The ruin closed on itself for an instant ere the waters of the Amet plunged forward into the gap, made a boiling rapid, and then spread themselves lazily along their accustomed levels.

The rain of things descending pitted the earth of the banks and threw the water in sheets and spurts. Then only the smoke and the blackened flanks of the dam, crumbling each minute as the river sucked them down, remained to tell of the work that had been.

'And now, Maharajah Sahib, what do I owe you?' said Tarvin, after he had satisfied himself that none of the more reckless coolies had been killed.

'That was very fine,' said the Maharajah. 'I never saw that before. It is a pity that it cannot come again.'

'What do I owe you?' repeated Tarvin.

'For that? Oh, they were my people. They ate a little grain, and many were from my jails. The powder was from the arsenal. What is the use to talk of paying? Am I a bunnia that I can tell what there is to pay? It was a fine tamasha. By God, there is no dam left at all.'

'You might let me put it right.'

'Tarvin Sahib, if you waited one year, or perhaps two years, you would get a bill; and besides, if anything was paid, the men who pay the convicts would take it all, and I should not be richer. They were my people, and the grain was cheap, and they have seen the tamasha. Enough. It is not good to talk of payment. Let us return to the city. By God, Tarvin Sahib, you are a quick man. Now there will be no one to play pachisi with me or to make me laugh. And the Maharaj Kun-

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war will be sorry also. But it is good that a man should marry. Yes, it is good. Why do you go, Tarvin Sahib? Is it an order of the Government?"

"Yes; the American Government. I am wanted there to help govern my State."

"No telegram has come for you," said the King simply. "But you are so quick."

Tarvin laughed lightly, wheeled his horse, and was gone, leaving the King interested but unmoved. He had finally learned to accept Tarvin and his ways as a natural phenomenon beyond control. As he drew rein instinctively opposite the missionary's door and looked for an instant at the city, the sense of the otherness of things daily seen that heralds swift coming change smote the mind of the American, and he shivered. "It was a bad dream—a very bad dream," he muttered, "and the worst of it is not one of the boys in Topaz would ever believe half of it." Then the eyes that swept the arid landscape twinkled with many reminiscences. "Tarvin, my boy, you've played with a kingdom, and for results it lays over monkeying with the buzz-saw. You were left when you sized this State up for a played-out hole in the ground; badly left. If you have been romping around six months after something you hadn't the sabe to hold when you'd got you've learned that much. . . . Topaz! Poor old Topaz!" Again his eyes ran round the tawny horizon, and he laughed aloud. The little town under the shadow of Big Chief, ten thousand miles away and all ignorant of the mighty machinery that had moved on its behalf, would have resented that laugh; for Tarvin, fresh from events that had shaken Rhatore to its heart, was almost patronising the child of his ambition.

He brought his hand down on his thigh with a smack,

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and turned his horse toward the telegraph-office. ‘How in the name of all that’s good and holy,’ said he, ‘am I to clear up this business with the Mutrie? Even a copy of the Naulahka in glass would make her mouth water.’ The horse cantered on steadily, and Tarvin dismissed the matter with a generous sweep of his free hand. ‘If I can stand it she can. But I’ll prepare her by electricity.’

The dove-coloured telegraph-operator and Postmaster-General of the State remembers even to-day how the Englishman who was not an Englishman, and, therefore, doubly incomprehensible, climbed for the last time up the narrow stairs, sat down in the broken chair, and demanded absolute silence; how, at the end of fifteen minutes’ portentous meditation and fingering of a thin moustache, he sighed heavily as is the custom of Englishmen when they have eaten that which disagrees with them, waved the operator aside, called up the next office, and clicked off a message with a haughty and high-stepping action of the hands. How he lingered long and lovingly over the last click, applied his ear to the instrument as though it could answer, and turning with a large sweet smile said—‘Finis, Babu. Make a note of that,’ and swept forth chanting the war-cry of his State:

‘It is not wealth nor rank nor state,
But get-up-and-git that makes men great.’

The bullock-cart creaked down the road to Rawut Junction in the first flush of a purple evening, and the low ranges of the Aravullis showed as many-coloured cloud banks against the turquoise sky-line. Behind it the red rock of Rhatore burned angrily on the yellow floors of the desert, speckled with the shadows of the

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browsing camels. Overhead the crane and the wild duck were flocking back to their beds in the reeds, and gray monkeys, family by family, sat on the roadside, their arms round one another's necks. The evening star came up from behind a jagged peak of rock and brushwood, so that its reflection might swim undisturbed at the bottom of an almost dried reservoir, buttressed with time-yellowed marble and flanked with silver plume-grass. Between the star and the earth wheeled huge fox-headed bats and night-jars hawking for the feather-winged moths. The buffaloes had left their water-holes, and the cattle were lying down for the night. Then villagers in far-away huts began to sing, and the hillsides were studded with home lights. The bullocks grunted as the driver twisted their tails, and the high grass by the roadside brushed with the wash of a wave of the open beach against the slow-turning tires.

The first breath of a cold-weather night made Kate wrap her rugs about her more closely. Tarvin was sitting at the back of the cart, swinging his legs and staring at Rhatore before the bends of the road should hide it. The realisation of defeat, remorse, and the torture of an over well-trained conscience were yet to come to Kate. In that hour, luxuriously disposed upon many cushions, she realised nothing more than a woman's complete contentment with the fact that there was a man in the world to do things for her, though she had not yet learned to lose her interest in how they were done.

The reiterated and passionate farewells of the women in the palace, and the cyclonic sweep of a wedding at which Nick had refused to efface himself as a bridegroom should, but had flung all their world forward on the torrent of his own vitality, had worn her out. The yearning

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of home-sickness—she had seen it in Mrs. Estes' wet eyes at the missionary's house an hour before—lay strong upon her, and she would fain have remembered her plunge into the world's evil as a dream of the night, but—

‘Nick,’ she said, softly.

‘What is it, little woman?’

‘Oh, nothing; I was thinking. Nick, what did you do about the Maharaj Kunwar?’

‘He's fixed, or I'm mistaken. Don't worry your head about that. After I'd explained a thing or two to old man Nolan he seemed to think well of inviting that young man to board with him until he starts for the Mayo College. Tumble?’

‘His poor mother! If only I could have—’

‘But you couldn't, little woman. Hi! Look quick, Kate! There she goes! The last of Rhatore.’

A string of coloured lights, high up on the hanging gardens of the palace, was being blotted out behind the velvet blackness of a hill shoulder. Tarvin leaped to his feet, caught the side of the cart, and bowed profoundly after the Oriental manner.

The lights disappeared one by one, even as the glories of a necklace had slidden into a Kabuli grape-box, till there remained only the flare from a window on a top-most bastion—a point of light as red and as remote as the blaze of the Black Diamond. That passed too, and the soft darkness rose out of the earth fold upon fold wrapping the man and the woman.

‘After all,’ said Tarvin, addressing the new-lighted firmament, ‘that was distinctly a side-issue.’

THE END

